BURIAL IN THE TIME OF THE AMORITES. THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE BURIAL CUSTOMS FROM A MESOPOTAMIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The paper focuses on the funerary customs attested in Middle Bronze Age (MBA) Mesopotamia, addressing the issue of common or distinctive characteristics and searching for potential evidence of assimilation of a new tribal-rooted identity. Specific burial practices, such as residential burials, use of vaulted chamber tombs and post-entombment rituals, were widely disseminated throughout the whole area during this period. Occurrence of donkey burials appears to be another distinctive trait in Upper Mesopotamia. Moreover, certain characteristic elements of these practices have been noted beyond Mesopotamia, in the Levant and as far as the eastern Nile Delta (Tell Daba'a), where they are associated with the Hyksos period. A puzzling resemblance between MBA funerary assemblages from Tell Arbid in northern Syria (Upper Mesopotamia) and the material from the distant region of Tell Daba'a (Avaris) was noted. This prompted a deeper study and presentation of the Mesopotamian MBA burials in a broader sociopolitical context, addressing issues of the character of similarities and discrepancies through comparison of relevant ritual variables throughout the area discussed. It confirmed a broad emergence of parallel mortuary behaviors focusing on kinship and ancestor commemoration. However, several areas do not fit this seemingly coherent picture of funerary customs, revealing distinctive regional identities. The changes in burial customs coincide with a sociopolitical transformation in Mesopotamia, resulting in the establishment of Amorite kingdoms and a profusion of pastoral tribes. It would seem, therefore, that the adoption of a new mortuary ideology and new constructed group identity was an answer to these sociopolitical developments.*

Keywords: *Middle Bronze Age burial customs, tribal organization, pastorals, Amorites, ancestor cult, chamber tombs, equid burials.*

Introduction

Certain elements of funerary practices, such as the widespread use of mud-brick vaulted chamber tombs, standardized grave inventories and evidence of post-entombment ritual practices, are a hallmark of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) in Mesopotamia in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. They are not genuinely new features, but their co-occurrence and broad dissemination speak of new concepts in the funerary program. The changes in burial customs coincide with a sociopolitical transformation which had the establishment of Amorite kingdoms and a textually attested presence of pastoral tribes (Amorites among them) in the region in the background. It would seem, therefore, that the dissemination of a specific set of burial customs could have been stimulated by these historical developments. One of the assumptions of this study is that the adoption of certain elements of ideology and mortuary practices derives from the need to tie new dynasties, and reorganized or newly settled people, and the new social order to a constructed identity offering roots and legitimization. Identity is understood here as a group's collective system of beliefs and practices, serving as a means of group integration and self-reproduction.[2] Burial, among its various functions, is a political demonstration, a way in which to legitimize social order.[3] Burial in the MBA would have been an important means through which to establish and demonstrate new forms of identity and affiliation within a world of changing sociopolitical reality. Yet, there are several areas that do not fit this seemingly coherent picture of funerary customs, although they remained at the very center of political and cultural developments. There are some areas with textually confirmed Amorite and/or tribal presence that do not feature typical MBA burial customs.

Certain characteristic elements of these practices have been noted beyond Mesopotamia, in the

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[1]   Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw.

[2]   HALLOTE 2002, 105.
[3]   ROBB 2007, 288.

Levant and as far as the eastern Nile Delta (Tell Daba'a, Tell Maskhuta or Tell Retaba), where they are associated with the Hyksos period.[4]

The focus of this paper is on analyzing the funerary customs attested in MBA Mesopotamia through a presentation and comparison of relevant ritual variables, addressing the issue of common and/or distinctive characteristics, and searching for potential evidence of assimilation of a new tribal-rooted group identity.

1. Mesopotamia in the time of the Amorites

The regions of northern and southern Mesopotamia, which were ruled by the so-called Amorite dynasties in the MBA, shared many cultural features despite being politically independent. Excavations and publications have not progressed at the same pace in the two regions, causing a disproportion in the material from the North and South. Upper Mesopotamia and especially the Jezireh region (the steppe between the Tigris and the Euphrates extending into modern north-eastern Syria and northern Iraq) are much better known thanks to regular excavations carried out from the 1990s until the outbreak of war in 2011 and subsequently published. This disproportion weighs on the conclusions, even up to the point of giving the impression of an unbalanced presentation. However, even without considering every site in the region, the material is still sufficiently profuse to support valid conclusions. The scope of the research presented here will undoubtedly be enhanced substantially with the publication of material from projects currently being conducted in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

The emergence of new elements of funerary practices coincided with a sociopolitical transformation taking place in the early 2nd millennium BC in the context of a deteriorating climate and subsequent profusion of sheep- and goat herding pastoralism. Turmoil followed the fall of the empire of the 3rd dynasty of Ur about 2004 BC. The Elamites invaded southern Mesopotamia and the ensuing 200 years at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC witnessed continuous strife between local kings vying to reestablish control over confederations of the city-states.[5] Settlement continuity in this period is very poorly recognized archeologically in the South. The transformative character of the period is substantiated by the absence of a central administration and few written sources. Power was seized eventually by rulers claiming to be of Amorite descent and greater and smaller "Amorite" kingdoms spread throughout the region.

The decline and even collapse of urban societies in northern Mesopotamia in the last centuries of the 3rd millennium BC have been linked in to paleoclimatological data of drought and changing climate conditions between 2200 and 2100 BC, which caused a drop in settlement numbers and shifting agricultural and pastoral strategies.[6] Similar changes occurred in northwestern Syria and along the big bend in the Euphrates, where many sites were abandoned and urban settlements declined.[7] The previously unimportant tribal component gained a new role in the state organization of Mesopotamia. Only the settlements on the big rivers in the Turkish Upper Euphrates and Tigris managed to adapt to the new conditions without undergoing major changes, although even there, the city-like settlements disappeared and the political system was reorganized.[8] A similar disintegration of urban societies in the late 3rd millennium BC was also observed in Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, Anatolia and the Aegean.[9]

New agricultural and pastoral strategies introduced after 1900 BC changed the situation significantly. Settlement rebounded in much of Upper Mesopotamia between 1900 and 1850 BC, but its nature changed dramatically. Small short-lived settlements became the rule,[10] with a large number of satellite villages surrounding the sparsely populated cities.[11] The agricultural and pastoral potential of lands in Upper Mesopotamia and the region's position on the trade route between Anatolia and Ashur made it a valuable prize for neighboring powers. Individual frontiers tended to fluctuate due to the rivalry between the great powers, warfare between smaller polities and constant involvement of the non-urban, pastoral population.

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[4]   Van den Brink 1982, 58; Schiestl 2002; Forstner-müller 2010; Rzepka et al. 2017; Bietak 2018.

[5]   De Boer 2014; 184–189.

[6]   Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 282–287; Riehl and Deckers 2012; Weiss 2012, 2014, 2017.

[7]   Ristvet 2014, 104.

[8]   Algaze et al. 2012.

[9]   Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, 282–287.

[10] Ristvet 2012.

[11] Ristvet 2014; Ristvet and Weiss 2014.

During the late 19th century BC, Samsi-Addu established his supremacy briefly over all of Upper Mesopotamia. After his death, the region fell to a coalition of local powers, including Sim'alite tribal people and petty rulers from the Idamaraz region (Upper Khabur river basin) answering to the Amorite ruler Zimri-Lim, residing in Mari. The final blow to the MBA Upper Mesopotamian Kingdom was delivered by Hammurabi of Babylon, who invaded and destroyed Mari and for the rest of the 18th century, Babylon from the south and Halab from the west vied for control over the area.

All things considered, the first half of the 2nd millennium BC was a period of changing alliances, warfare and political instability. The appearance of the Amorites on the political scene is not accompanied by any evidence of their mass migrations during the MBA. However, there were population shifts in the abandonment of settlements, a changing mode of life and the profusion of tribal pastoralists. Some of them might have been of Amorite origin but many were not. The term "Amorite" in the cuneiform sources came to mean "tribal," losing its ethnic connotations. The Amorites who, by alliance or marriage, took control over Mesopotamian territory in the 18th century BC became an attractive affiliation for others wishing to be associated with an Amorite/tribal identity.[12]

2. Ritual variability of the MBA Mesopotamian burial practices

Selected ritual variables have been chosen for comparison to shape an understanding of potential convergences and discrepancies between sites and communities represented in this extensive funerary material from MBA Mespotamia. These variables are meant to trace both social distinctions and evidence of rituals in a post-processual approach.

Laneri summarizes the "rediscovery" of ritual in the past twenty years as not only a religious phenomenon but also a secular experience.[13] Ritual performances also convey information about social relationships and perception of the world within a given society.[14] In this perspective, adherence to specific rules (formalities) appears to be among the most important elements during the enactment of rituals and is characteristic of certain communities. Rituals may be also renewed and transformed by contacts between different communities and the different social scenarios in which they were enacted.

Non-meaningful similarities between different societies are bound to be found wherever a number of societies practice several different disposal methods at the same time.[15] Ethnographic experience suggests that attention should be switched from singular burial forms to exceptional and possibly diagnostic cultural traits or to the varying proportions of different burial practices.[16] Therefore, the source material available in the form of excavated and published private MBA sepulchral data has been analyzed with the following set of variables in mind: a) Spatial distribution of graves; b) tomb concept; c) burial mode and postmortem treatment of human remains; d) quality and quantity of grave inventories; and e) visible post-funeral rituals/practices.[17] These variables have been chosen as a set of archaeologically visible features to be cross-checked as relevant elements building the variability of the MBA rituals.[18]

The spatial distribution of graves, in terms of their proximity to sacred or profane spheres within a settlement and relationship between the domains of the living and the deceased, is particularly relevant for characterizing social and ritual complexity.[19] The examination is technically on two levels: In the macroscale – concerning the presence or absence of a settlement in the vicinity of the grave or graveyards, and in the microscale – in reference to coexisting domestic or public architecture. Aside from its location, the individual tomb concept may reflect the social position of the deceased (e.g. age or gender)[20] or the affordability of given

[12]   De Boer 2014.

[13]   Laneri 2007.

[14]   Laneri 2007, 3.

[15]   Ucko 1969.

[16]   Ucko 1969; Tainter 1978, 121.

[17]   The material presented in this paper was analyzed for the most part in the author's unpublished PhD dissertation (Wygnańska 2006) concerning burial customs in MBA Mesopotamia, submitted in 2006 to the University of War-

saw. It has been updated to include the most recent excavation results and publications concerning the Amorite question. It was presented during a workshop at the 11th ICAANE in Munich.

[18]   Andreou 2016.

[19]   Brown 1981, 29; O'Shea 1984, 43; Morris 1992, 24–29; Parker Pearson 1993.

[20]   Tainter 1978, 125.

grave solutions, thus, reflecting the social rank and/or economic position of the deceased and their families. It might also be correlated with various ritual activities resulting from different attitudes toward the deceased. Grave accessibility, whether separating the deceased from the living or enabling further contact, speaks of planned ritual action.[21] It is either intended for conspicuous celebration of a funeral by the community to which the deceased belonged or as a simple means of formal deposition in the ground.[22] In this sense, graves have fixed access (graves with vertical shafts, chamber tombs with dromoi), or restricted access (pits, cists, vessel burials). Furthermore, the deposition mode may be discerned, whether primary or secondary interment, individual or collective, and the actual resting position of the human remains. Sex and gender ratios have also been considered, however, a deficiency of anthropological data biases the conclusions. A study of the postmortem treatment of human remains will reveal bone manipulation practices that merit special attention in a context of prolonged contacts between the deceased and the living.

The diversity of grave inventories, beginning with differentiated pottery, is certainly observable within the vast territory discussed here. General observations on quantity and ritual or status-related functionality of the grave goods will be presented, also regarding the position of the objects inside or outside the grave, to narrow down the discussion. Evidence of post-funeral rituals demonstrated in the archaeological record will be addressed here. Rituals that were observed beside the broad category of rites related to the general treatment of corpses concerned certain, non-elite groups of the deceased, substantiating an ancestral commemorative cult alongside the textual sources. A comparative study of these variables will identify common denominators or their absence, as impotant elements for the ritual variability of the MBA private burial customs across regions. It will contribute to building an understanding of poten-

tial convergences and discrepancies between the sites in Mesopotamia.

The presentation will start with the best explored region of Upper Mesopotamia, focusing particularly on Tell Arbid, which stands at the core of the author's research in the Upper Khabur basin of north-eastern Syria. From there it will expand to cover the wider range of the Khabur-ware distribution zone in the region to the east of the Khabur river, and then move further afield to include sites on the Middle Euphrates and, ultimately, in southern Mesopotamia.

3. Funerary material from Mesopotamia

3.1 Funerary practices in northern Mesopotamia

3.1.1 Case study: Tell Arbid (northeastern Syria)

Sixty graves dated to the MB I–II were excavated at Tell Arbid, a muliperiod settlment by the PCMA, University of Warsaw team[23] and by the UAM expedition[24] [Fig. 1, 2]. The small-sized settlement from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC witnessed a shift in burial customs. A set of new funerary practices was introduced following a short occupation hiatus at the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.[25] The earliest occupation from the MBA I (Old Jezireh I period: OJ) was represented by pits with ashes, pottery kilns and a few graves but no substantial architecture.[26] Graves relevant to this early period were concentrated in two spots: On the top of the tell and on the northeastern slope. Both areas were in continuous use as burial places from the late Early Bronze Age (EBA; Early Jezireh V: EJ) to the OJ II period [Table 1 Chronological chart]. The OJ I graves were pits, cist and jar burials in shafts, as well as a single "diamond-roofed" chamber grave (see below) not associated with any permanent architecture. The main tell in the OJ II period was a patchy settlement with houses encroaching partly onto the OJ I cemeteries, but the burial tradition was continued in both areas, evolving, without any

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[21] Andreou 2016.

[22] Andreou 2016, 188.

[23] The excavation project at Tell Arbid was conducted in 1996–2010 by a Polish–Syrian Mission of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA), University of Warsaw, co-directed by Prof. Piotr Bieliński on the Polish side and Dr Ahmed Serriye for the Directorate General of Syrian Antiquities SAR on the other side.

[24] The excavation project in sector P was carried out by Prof. Rafał Koliński's team from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The MBA graves from this project are published online (The Gate to Mesopotamia).

[25] Koliński and Goslar 2019 on C[14] dates for the hiatus at Tell Arbid.

[26] Koliński 2014; Wygnańska 2014; Koliński and Goslar 2019.
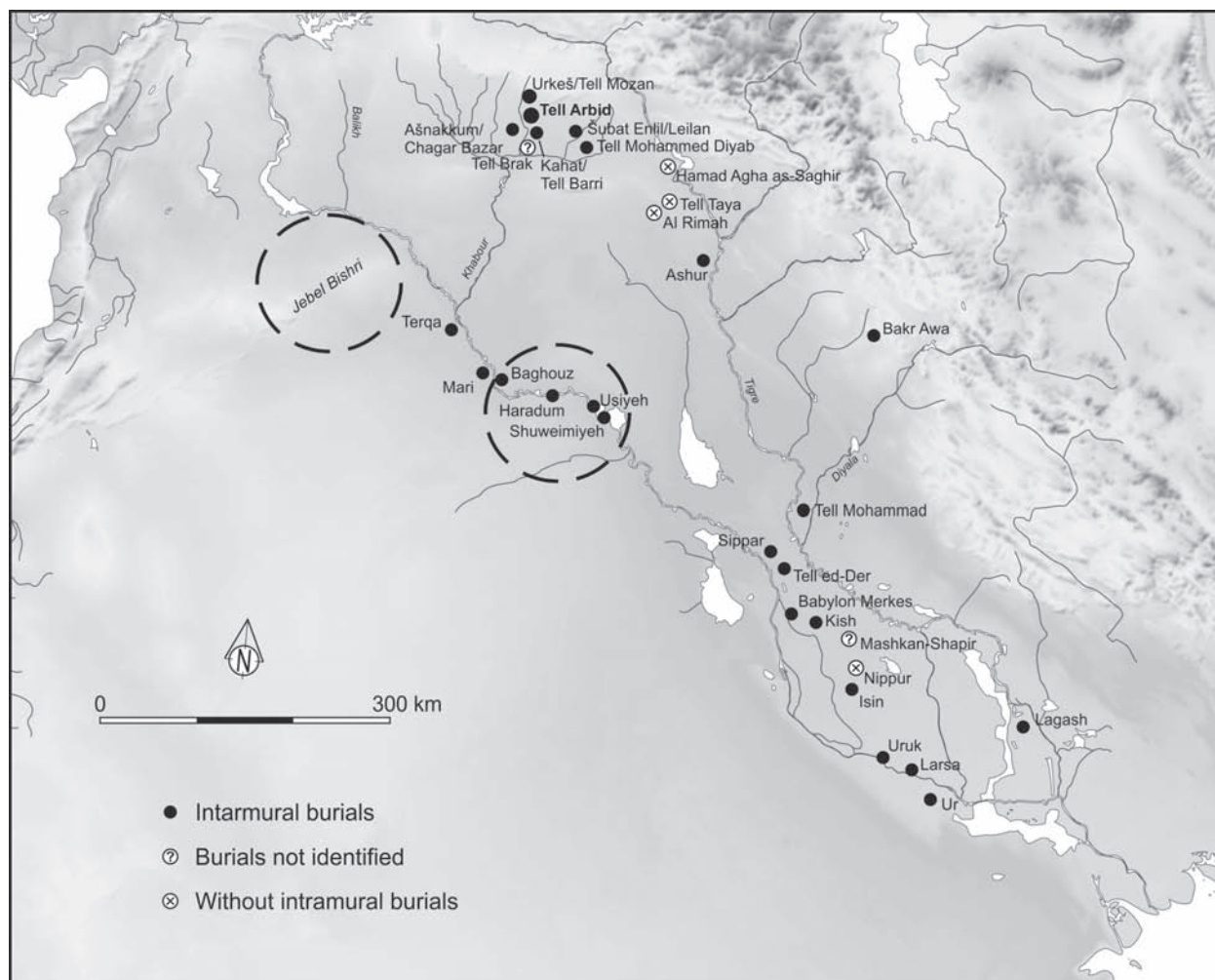
Fig. 1 Distribution of the MBA Mesopotamian sites mentioned in the text
(Drawn and digitized by D. Pągowski, M. Wagner, M. Momot)

visible break in the material culture, to form a set of characteristic features that are representative of the OJ II period (or MB II). New graves were placed next to or between the houses and, in the late OJ II, they also started to be dug into already abandoned or partly ruined houses. Graves from this period were also found outside these two areas in practically all of the excavated parts of the tell,

often situated within a settled zone but outside contemporary houses. Thus, a preference for the intramural location of the graves is evident, especially in the OJ II phase [Fig. 2].

The six graves that are dated to OJ I represent a transitional period with a few robust remains of architecture at the site; they seem to have been dug into, among others, refuse layers covering the

Dates BC (Middle chronology)	Upper Mesopotamia	Lower Mesopotamia	Levant	Egypt
2150-2000	EJ 5 (post-Akkadian)	Ur III	EB IV	First Intermediate period
2000-1850	Old Jezireh I (OJ)	Isin-Larsa	MB I	Middle Kingdom
1850-1550	OJ II-III	Old Babylonian	MB II	MB III
				Second Intermediate: Hyksos period

Tab. 1 Simplified chronological chart (after Steiner and Killebrew 2014, Handbook of Levantine Archaeology)
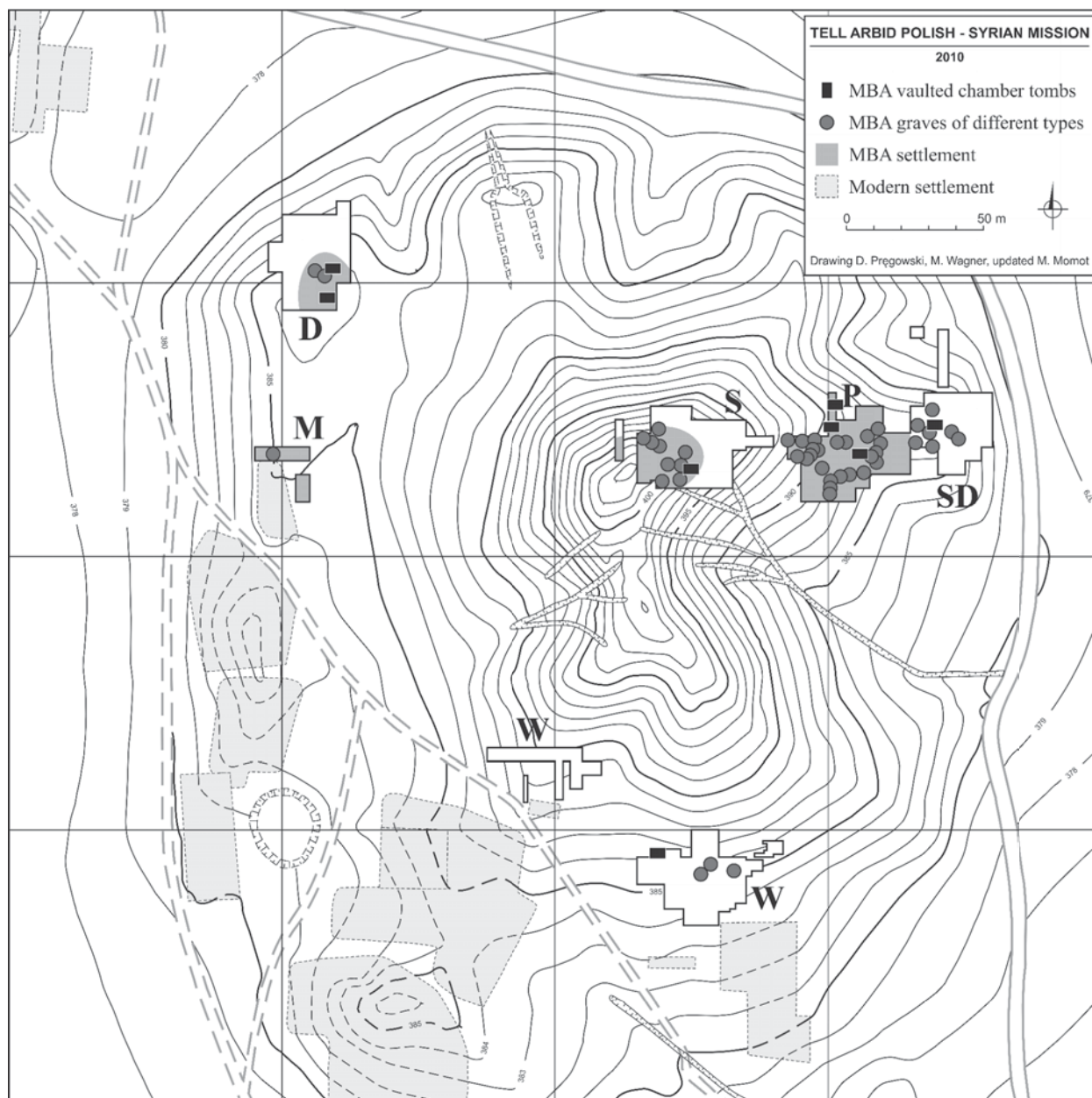
1.
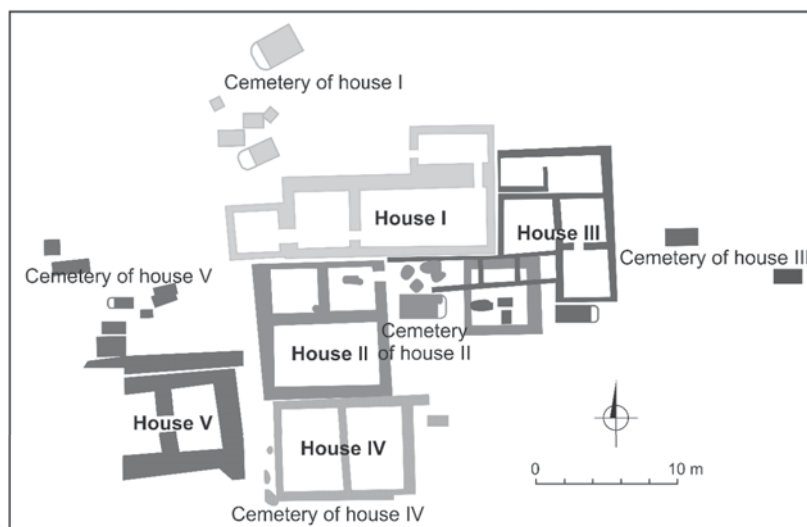
2.

Fig. 2.1 Contour map of the mound at Tell Arbid with the distribution of the MBA graves on Tell Arbid in all excavated sectors
(D, S, P, SD, W, M) (Digitized by M. Momot);

Fig. 2.2 Plan of the MBA houses excavated in sector P with position of associated cemeteries marked (Drawn by X. Kolińska)

EJ V settlement. Houses springing up in the said burial areas in the OJ II period coexisted with graves, which did not cease appearing here throughout the period. Moreover, these residential burials were dug either outside contemporary houses, in the walls of already ruined structures or in empty spaces with no architecture. Only infant burials were interred under the floors of contemporary households, although the practice was not a rule.

A significant innovation in the OJ I–II period was the equal representation of all age groups, although one can hardly consider roughly 100 individuals buried in the 60 graves recorded at Tell Arbid as representing an entire MBA population. Some people must have been buried elsewhere or could have been deprived of formal burial. Nonetheless, the OJ I–II burials represented by all age groups are much more numerous than burials in any other period at Tell Arbid.

Another remarkable innovation observed at Tell Arbid is the introduction of a large variation of grave types, and, most of all, the introduction of vaulted chamber tombs each with a horizontal dromos, which is a benchmark of the MBA. Infants and younger children (up to five years old) were buried in vessels, storage jars or pots, deposited most often in simple shaft tombs with a side niche [Fig. 3.1] or, rarely, pits. In view of the continuity of this form of burial between the late EJ V and OJ II period, vessel burials in shafts should actually be considered as a link between the two periods. A few shaft burials with a roomy side niche instead of a container for adults, separated from a shaft by a low wall, were attested also in the OJ I–II periods [Fig. 3.2]. Adult burials in simple pits were much fewer; these were always very poor burials deprived of any grave inventories. Simple mud-brick cists, intended for older children and adolescents, were just as rare [Fig. 3.3]. The more elaborate and labor-intensive mud-brick chamber tombs were represented by two types. A characteristic roofing earned them the excavators' provisional dubbing as "diamond-roofed" [Figs. 3, 4]. Rows of square bricks were set vertically over the gap between the side walls of the chamber, the corners of each brick resting upon opposite walls of the grave, thus, resembling a diamond shape. These tombs were constructed in rectangular pits or, in a few cases, at the bottom of shallow vertical shafts.

The other type was a tomb with a more elaborate roofing, constructed of three parallel rows of bricks set in a "diamond" pattern, and provided with a dromos at one of its short sides to enable successive burials [Fig. 4]. The single masonry diamond-roofed tombs were generally intended for individual primary adult burials, although in one case, several children were interred. The triple diamond-roofed chamber contained multiple burials.

The vaulted chamber tomb with a horizontal access via a dromos was the most time- and resource-consuming structure of the newly introduced grave types [Fig.3.5]. At Tell Arbid it appeared in the OJ II, but was attested earlier at the neighboring site of Urkeš (Tell Mozan).[27] A rectangular pit in front of the chamber acted as an access way, enabling successive burials to be made through an arched opening in one of the short sides and allowing the deposition of post-funeral offerings in the dromos. These were specific ritual activities that were otherwise attested only for the triple diamond-roofed chambers at Tell Arbid. The vaulted chamber tombs were underground structures, but a low retention wall built over a frontal arch marked the position of the grave on the ground. In fact, vaulted chamber tombs were the only subterranean funerary structures with a marked position, indicating that the grave was a planned target for further visits and its location within the settlement was not chosen randomly.

The extensive variation in grave types at Tell Arbid in this period is difficult to explain. It can be partly correlated with the age of the deceased, although it, too, did not form a clear pattern. The youngest children were buried in vessels placed in shafts – if outside a household – and in pits when under a house floor. Older children and adolescents were buried in cist graves or diamond-roofed chambers; these were also used for adults. It happened, however, that a four-year-old child was buried in a diamond-roofed tomb constructed inside a shaft. Vaulted chamber tombs were reserved for adults (although infants and children could have been buried with the grown-ups). Shaft burials without a vessel container were an alternative version for adults and so were the pit burials. The latter, always without grave goods, were probably a cheaper burial option or conditioned ritually. In

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27   WISSING 2017.

terms of funerary rituals, the graves represent two types: Graves with possible post-funeral access (vaulted chamber tombs, triple-diamond roofed chambers) and graves with no intermidiate access (pits, cists, single-diamond roofed chambers, shaft burials with blocked entrances).
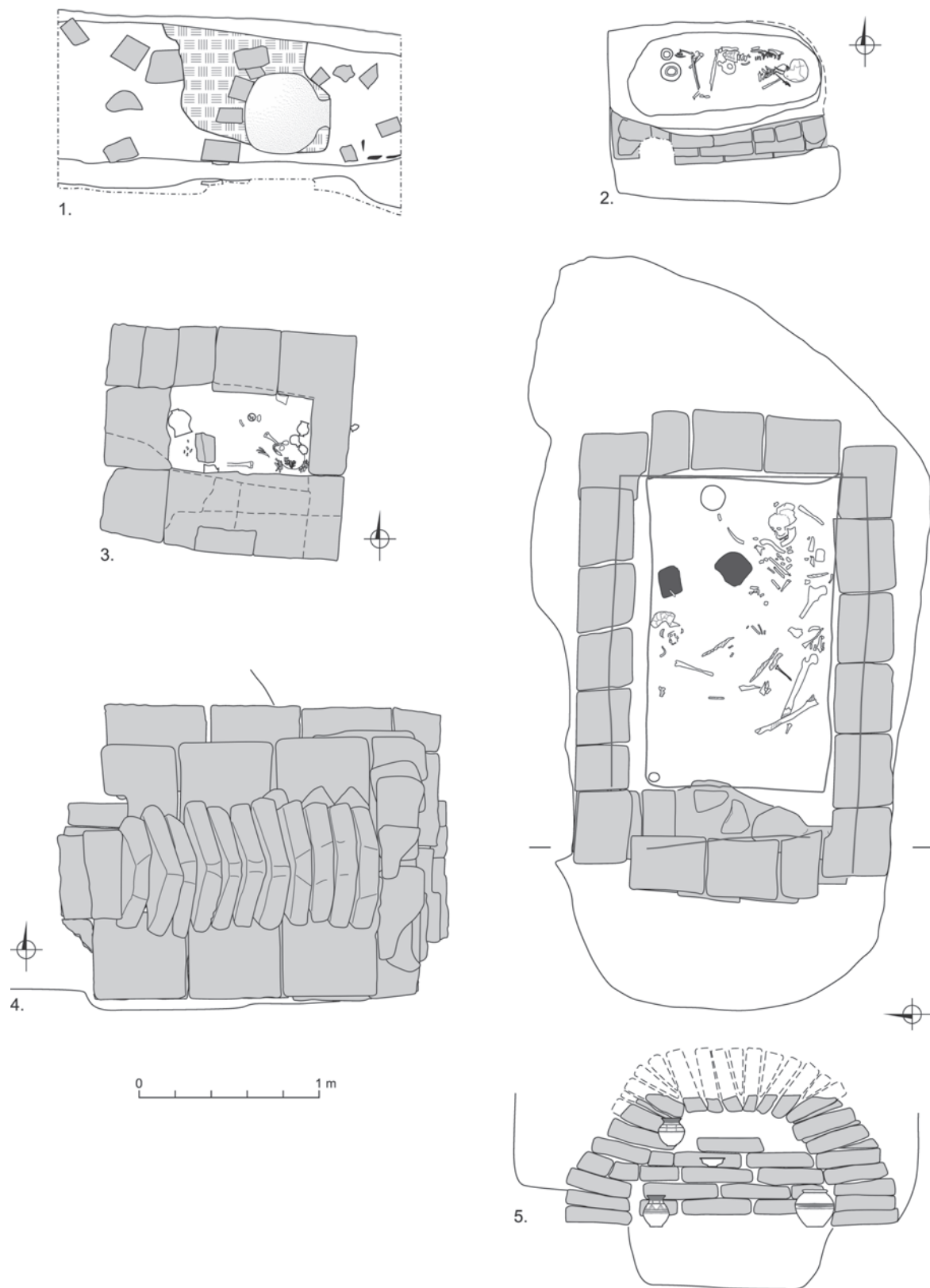

Fig. 3 MBA grave types from Tell Arbid: 1. Vessel burial in shaft; 2. adult shaft burial (view from top); 3. cist grave; 4. "diamond-roofed" grave; 5. vaulted chamber tomb (view from top and from the entrance) (Digitized by M. Momot)

Fig. 4 Triple "diamond-roofed" tomb with dromos from Tell Arbid (Photo X. Kolińska)

Fig. 5 Vaulted chamber tomb from Tell Arbid – view from dromos with post-funeral offerings deposited in front of the tomb (Photo M. Szabłowski).

The MBA grave inventories at Tell Arbid were quite standardized and there was no unambiguous association between the quantity and quality of grave goods and the work/time invested in grave construction [Fig. 6]. Pottery vessels deposited next to the deceased included from one to several vessels: Mainly jars and/or pots, sometimes cups (miniature juglets, in the case of children's graves), although no characteristic sets were observed. While not a rule, vessels were frequently of a very poor quality, overfired or broken. There is no indication that they constituted remnants of a funerary banquet; it seems more probable that they repre-

sented symbolic provisions for the transition to the afterlife. Animal offerings were frequent: It was often a large portion of a sheep, pig or cattle carcass deposited either behind the head or at the feet of the deceased, or outside in the dromos.[28]

Humble personal jewelry most often consisted of a few beads made of shells, agate, carnelian (very popular at the time) or vitreous materials, occasionally copper/bronze pins, bracelets or armlets. Interestingly, lapis lazuli, which was used till the end of the 3rd millennium for adornments, disappeared from MBA graves.[29] Certain object categories, such as metal beer kits (strainers, tweezers,

[28] Piątkowska-Małecka and Wygnańska 2012.
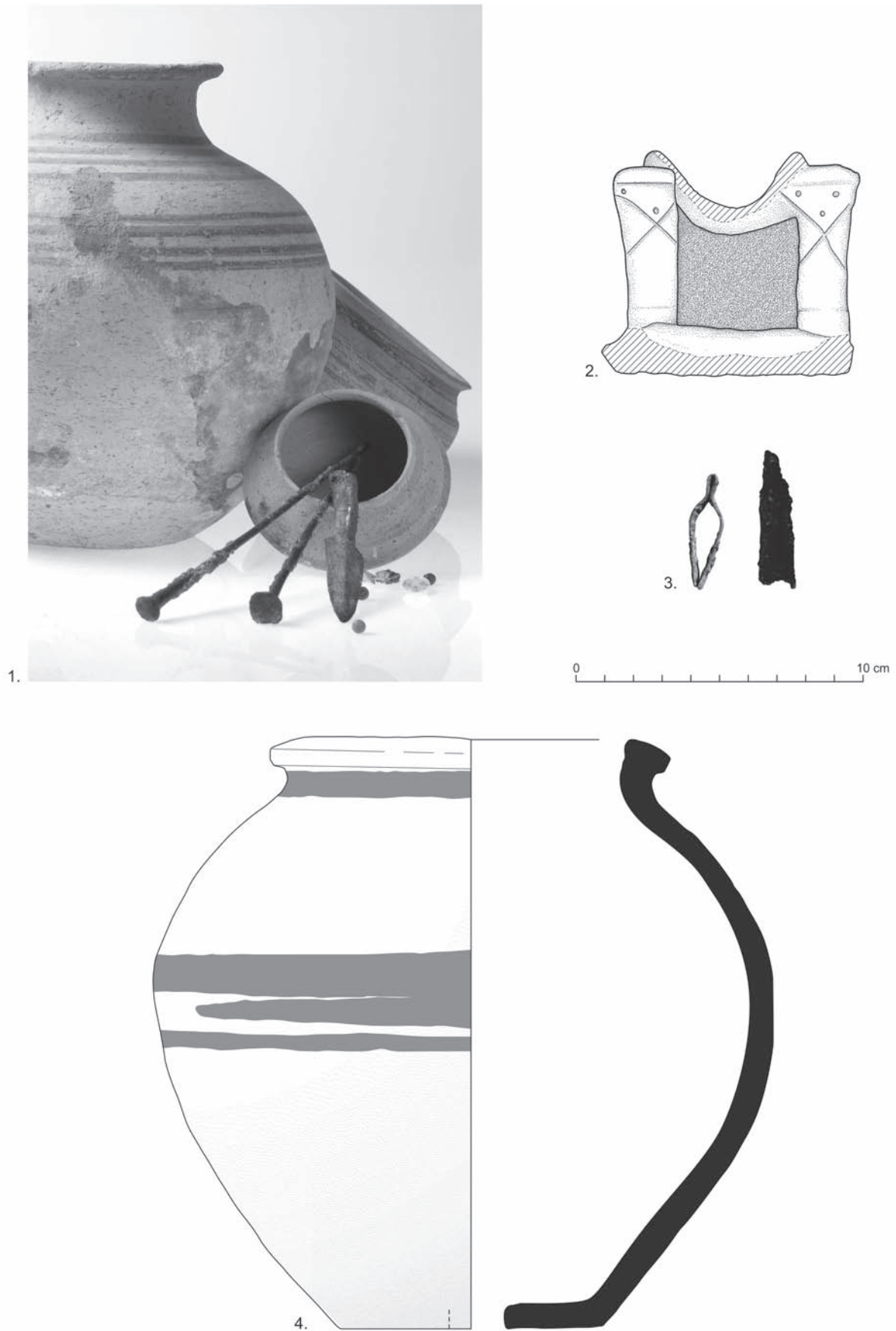
[29] Wygnańska 2019.

Fig. 6 Typical grave inventories from MBA graves at Tell Arbid: 1. Vessels, spearhead, toggle pins, beads (photo T. Tam);
2. clay andiron (or incense burner); 3. elements of a beer kit: Tweezers and metal strainer and 4. jar with perforated bottom
(Digitized by M. Momot).

Fig. 7 Dog burial in dromos of one of the chamber tombs at Tell Arbid (Photo T. Tam)

perforated pots) [Fig. 6.3-4], small clay incense burners/andirons [Fig. 6.2] and weapons, mainly spearheads [Fig. 6.1] and singular examples of axe-heads or daggers, may have carried symbolic meaning. At Tell Arbid, they were restricted to chamber tombs, but were also found in graves of other types at other sites. Such grave goods were evidently associated with adult graves and never accompanied children if the latter were buried alone. Accompanying animal burials were also found only in association with chamber tombs (see below) [Fig. 7].

The first attestation of an ancestor cult practiced at the grave is from the OJ II period.[30] The evidence is in the form of ritual deposits: Meat cuts or vessels, sequentially interred after the funeral in the vaulted tombs, inside the dromos at three different levels at least [Figs. 3.5; 5]. Traces of such ritual practices were associated with the tombs with collective, successive burials. The deceased buried in such graves were both male and female, mainly adults, although sometimes accompanied by children. Seldom were graves of this kind made distinct by the presence of grave goods that could indicate the high social standing of the deceased. However, there was a correlation between the tombs and accompanying equid and

dog burials: An equine (possibly an onager) and a young dog were found buried outside a vaulted chamber with a collective secondary burial; the dog was found in the dromos [Fig. 7], and a secondary burial of the complete skeleton of the equid was placed in a pit in front of the dromos.[31] A donkey skull was deposited on top of another vaulted chamber and further complete dog burial was also found in the dromos of another vaulted chamber.[32] Such finds have parallels at other sites in the Jezireh region. The chamber tombs were found in several small grave concentrations at the site, possibly family cemeteries [Fig. 2.2]. Although they were the most elaborate structures within these cemeteries, they were standardized across sites; there were no larger differences between the chamber burials at Tell Arbid and other sites in the Upper Khabur basin in terms of location or grave inventories (see below). Thus, the evidence of the post-funeral rituals was limited to a restricted segment of society buried in the chamber tombs, not visibly linked to the economic status or high rank of the deceased. The traces of worship were associated with male and female adults, most probably representing important family members, who became venerated ancestors after their death. Based on ethnographic comparisons, such ritual

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[30]   WYGNAŃSKA 2014.

[31]   An equid skeleton was found as a secondary deposit in a pit. The skeleton was complete but mixed, most probably moved from another burial place and reburied. The same

happened to a collective secondary human burial in the chamber (WYGNAŃSKA 2012, Fig. 3)

[32]   WYGNAŃSKA 2014, 2017.

behavior may be interpreted as ancestral worship helping to legitimize property/land transmission rights.[33]

Bone manipulation practices were another new ritual practiced at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. Bones were rearranged within graves, there were secondary burials, disarticulated or incomplete skeletons (absence of bones or body parts), and some of the graves were emptied of human remains. It concerns only about 10 % of all the burials, but it is, nevertheless, a constant ritual variable evidenced on many MBA sites.

3.1.2 Sites in the Upper Khabur basin

Many of the characteristic traits of funerary practices identified above were also noted at several other sites in the Syrian and Iraqi Jezireh, within the Khabur-ware pottery distribution zone. These areas also constituted part of the Upper Mesopotamian Kingdom realm in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. No uniform funerary pattern was noted, but enough common ritual variables spoke of a shared burial tradition during this period.

Three sites, other than Tell Arbid, from the Upper Khabur basin have been regularly excavated and published in detail: Urkeš (Tell Mozan), Kahat (Tell Barri) and Ašnakkum (Chagar Bazar) [Fig. 1].[34] Supplementary data comes from other sites in this region where graves were published only cursorily. These three sites in the Upper Khabur basin were small to middle-size towns during the MBA. Some of them, such as Ašnakkum, housed secular and sacral public architecture dated to MBA II; this urban center was also interlinked with the wider political world of northern and southern Mesopotamia. Urkeš, Kahat and another site – Tell Mohammed Diyab[35] – were still towns but significantly reduced in size in the 2nd millennium BC compared to the area occupied in the 3rd millennium BC. Šubat Enlil (Tell Leilan), once Samsi-Addu's capital in the 18th century BC, seemed to function as a "hollow city"

with administrative buildings but a sparse population at best.[36]

Most of the sites do not seem to have been abandoned for longer between the EBA and MBA, although many of them witnessed some kind of crisis or local short hiatus preceding a reorganization of these localities and the funerary practices.[37] A similar scenario was often observed: Firstly, a small graveyard without any clear association with architecture would appear at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC and then burial customs would evolve into a typical MBA II ritual with burials interred concomitantly with the houses, often under their floors.

Spatial distribution of the graves

A significant increase in the number of residential burials is apparent during the MBA at most sites. They represent only a part of the population per site, indicating that the practice was concurrent with other methods of body disposal. Even so, the number of graves from the MBA found within settlements is much higher than in the preceding periods. Moreover, the age of the deceased turns out to be evenly distributed, with a slight tendency to a majority of adult burials in some phases.

The introduction of this custom was gradual at most of the sites: firstly, during the earlier MBA I (OJ I) phase, cemeteries appeared unassociated with domestic architecture (Tell Arbid, Kahat). In some places however, such as Urkeš, tombs appeared in connection with the architecture already at the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, announcing the emergence of a new wave of settlement and a shift in burial practices.

Around the 18th century BC, graves at most of the sites in the Upper Khabur region were regularly dug either close to the houses or under the floors of inhabited buildings. At some sites, they formed small graveyards concentrated near particular houses, probably reflecting an affiliation to a household or family.[38] It seems that in some cases, the decision to bury under the floor of a standing

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[33] GLUCKMAN 1937; GOODY 1962; FORTES 1965; BRADBURY and PHILIP 2016, 313.

[34] For Urkeš (Tell Mozan): KHAROBI et al. 2012; KHAROBI and BUCCELLATI 2017; WISSING 2017; Kahat (Tell Barri): PECORELLA 1998; VALENTINI 2003, unpublished; Ašnakkum (Chagar Bazar): MALLOWAN 1936, 1947; CURTIS 1982; MCMAHON et al. 2001; LÉON 2018; TUNCA et al. 2018.

[35] BACHELOT 1992; NICOLLE 2006, 2012.

[36] WEISS et al. 1990; RISTVET 2012; leilan.yale.edu/about-project/excavations/qarni-lim-palace.

[37] KOLIŃSKI and GOLSAR 2019.

[38] WYGNAŃSKA 2014; WISSING 2017.

inhabited house or between the houses depended on how dense the architecture was in a given spot at the site. Significantly, the MBA graves were also dug in the ruins of already abandoned earlier MBA houses. Thus, despite continued occupation, some of the graves were located outside a house in the nearby ruins. Unlike the earlier periods, this spatial proximity of household members – the living and the dead – is very explicit in the MBA, pointing to a continued relationship over generations.[39]

Emphasis on familial connections was not the only rule governing choice of burial place. It was noted at the more important urban centers, such as Šubat Enlil or Ašnakkum, that selected prominent burials were located inside official buildings. Significantly, these graves were sometimes made after the building had ceased to serve official functions, indicating a continued memory of the significance of the place. Thus, differentiating the burial place within a settlement seemed to play a crucial role in emphasizing the social status of the deceased, may it be their high rank or association with a particular family or clan unit.

Grave types

A variety of new grave types involving different degrees of labor and material expenditure was introduced at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC at all of the sites discussed. Different grave types with limited or restricted access, such as vessel burials, pits, shafts, cists and diamond-roofed chambers, were used simultaneously. It was also the first time that the concept of a private, non-elite chamber tomb which enabled multiple access was attested in this region. At the same time, some of the 3rd millennium grave types ceased to be used in the MBA I (e.g. the cist graves at Ašnakkum).[40] The range of different grave structures increased again at the beginning of the MBA II (OJ II). Various traditions of grave type selection were displayed at different sites in the Upper Khabur region. An exceptional feature of Ašnakkum, for example, was the uninterrupted use of shaft graves from the EBA to the MBA, the type being a dominant form in both periods. Tell Arbid, Urkeš and Ašnakkum were the only three sites where characteristic "diamond-roofed" tombs were attested in the MBA (as on Fig. 3.4). At Tell

Arbid, chambers with triple diamond-roofing had a dromos and could be reopened for subsequent burials (the same as the vaulted chamber tombs), but at Ašnakkum, they were intended for individual burials, the entrance being blocked after burial. Unlike the other sites, at Urkeš, the vaulted chamber tombs were built of stone slabs. Apart from these variations, the sites shared much in common.

The considerable differentiation of grave types seems to be at least partly age-related. Infants tended to be buried in complete or fragmentary vessels placed in shafts. They were seldom buried in other grave types and vessel burials were actually limited to this age group. Vessel burials of infants were sometimes also found in pits when buried under a house floor.

Vaulted chambers and diamond-shaped tombs were intended for grown-ups, including possibly socially fully-fledged children over ten years old. Children over two years old only rarely accompanied the adults in such graves. This simple age relationship does not explain the whole complexity of the phenomenon of grave type differentiation. No evident correlation between the preparation of the grave and the economic status or rank of the deceased was evident. Indeed, ethnographical observations indicate that the choice of grave type may reflect the status of the deceased, which cannot always be detected archaeologically.[41]

The most characteristic common feature of the MBA period was the introduction of elaborate vaulted chamber tombs each with a side access, not intended for elites but for much broader use. These were big, approximately 2.5 x 1.5 m, rectangular mud-brick tombs under a barrel-vaulted roof. There are technical variations in grave construction between sites but altogether, the graves look very similar from site to site. The entrance always led from the side via a rectangular dromos in front of the tomb; this side was often reinforced with a retention wall rising above ground, separating the tomb from the dromos. Such tombs were found inside private houses or in their closest vicinity. Some of them were underground structures marked on the surface by a retention wall (Tell Arbid), others were built aboveground, integrated into contemporary house (Urkeš). Whether the tombs were underground structures that were marked on the surface or aboveground funerary structures, they shared an important feature: They

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[39]   Cradic 2017, 239.
[40]   Tunca et al. 2018, 37–78.

[41]   As, for example, non-hierarchical status or circumstances of death (Ucko 1969).

were planned as a structure for reopening and reuse. This concept was disseminated around the 18th century BC and continued until the end of the MBA period; at Urkeš alone some of the chamber tombs started being used at the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. Chamber tombs were generally associated with collective, often successive and possibly family burials.[42] Exceptions occurred: At Ašnakkum, where shaft graves predominated, vaulted chambers were few and contained mostly individual burials. However, collective burials were occasionally also found in other grave types at this site. Significantly, these most elaborate grave structures did not always reflect the economic status of a nearby house, nor was there a simple and visible correlation between prestigious grave goods and vaulted chamber tombs. Surprisingly, the grave goods in these meticulously built funerary structures consisted of a few vessels, animal bones or a spearhead. Some sites yielded important individual burials in the chamber tombs (Šubat Enlil, Tell Mohammed Diyab), but this was hardly a rule. Despite their elaboration, chamber tombs were in no way exceptional. They were quite common, found in most of the households and near family graveyards. They were often associated with collective burials and bone manipulation practices. As such, they seem to represent burials of family members probably crucial to the family lineage.[43] Other grave types containing single burials were often clustered around them, possibly reflecting family ties. So, despite being the costliest, these tombs were not unique, elite burial structures.

Demographics and deposition mode

Residential interments were attested in all age groups and both sexes in varying proportions at different sites. There was nothing exceptional noted about the manner of treatment of the body of the deceased. In the case of a primary burial, the deceased was placed on their side, with legs contracted and arms near the face. Such treatment was continued unchanged from the 3rd millennium BC. Not really new, but much more frequently attested, were secondary burials. They concerned

adults and were found in cist or pit graves, chamber tombs and in the entrance dromoi. One of the tentative explanations for such a practice is that the human remains might have originally been interred in the chambers and then relocated when the house and tomb owners moved out.[44] It should be added that many sites have yielded examples of empty chamber tombs (with no evident traces of being looted) and it seems that they may have been emptied by the family moving out and packing ancestral bones for reburial elsewhere. They could, however, have serve as cenotaphs.[45]

Grave inventories and associated ritual practices during entombment

Standardized grave goods had a patterned spatial distribution in the burials regardless of grave type or location. The deceased was usually buried with one to five vessels; not infrequently, these vessels were of poor quality, overfired or partly broken. The set frequently consisted of jars (often more than one), sometimes pots, and rarely cups. The vessels were usually placed behind the head of the deceased as if they constituted their provisions for the journey beyond.

In the case of collective, sequential burials, the older grave goods were not removed but often intermingled with the new goods, even if the bones had been pushed aside. Symptomatically, in a secondary burial from Tell Arbid, vessels were piled up on a heap of bones, showing that such inventories belonged to the domain of death, even if the status of the deceased changed after decomposition and the goods were no longer considered as containing provisions.

Personal adornment most often included several beads (usually dispersed in the grave in a way that does not allow a reconstruction of their original arrangement) and shell rings; adults usually had a bronze or copper toggle pin (most often in female burials) and, more rarely, bracelets or anklets. Ranked status-related objects were rather rare: A small percentage of burials from the MBA II included weapons, most often spearheads, probably laid with their wooden shafts alongside the body. Prestigious grave goods, such as personal adorn-

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[42] A family burial is hypothesized based on archaeological data; confirmation of common lineages could come only from genetic or biological data studies. Nevertheless, this kind of common burial in residential areas and with traces of post-funeral veneration points to a concept of kinship

that might be based on shared ideologies of descent (Cradic 2017, 223).

[43] Wygnańska 2014.

[44] Galli and Valentini 2006.

[45] Wissing 2017, 323–327.

ment of precious materials and cylinder seals, were very limited and were usually found in individual pit burials located near an important building.

Small clay incense burners, referred to as "andirons," presented a very local tradition specific to the Upper Khabur region and reflected rituals confined to this area.[46] They appeared only in adult burials, in both individual and collective graves of different types. Beer-drinking and -serving utensils (metal strainers and tweezers, pots with perforated bottoms) in some graves may also be viewed as a characteristic trait of the MBA rituals, also known from other sites in northern Mesopotamia. Beer-serving utensils are also known from various southern Levantine sites.[47] Such objects seemed to have carried a symbolic meaning.[48] At Tell Arbid, both beer kits and andirons were found only in chamber tombs. No such clear association was observed at other sites.

It is not evident that funerary feasts were practiced during the funeral. Animal cuts were attested quite frequently, often deposited with adults, next to the vessels inside the grave and representing a deceased "share" in a possible funerary banquet or the afterlife provision. This evidence, however, is not conclusive. Traces of what might have been a communal funerary banquet were found at two sites. Broken vessels and animal bones were found below the skeleton in a conspicuous, rich, single chamber burial at Šubat Enlil.[49] The event apparently preceded the deposition of human remains. The burial was fitted with seven complete vessels in the grave and three vessels in the dromos in front of the entrance, so it seems that particular concentrations of artifacts had different functions. At Kahat, broken vessels covered the floor of a room abutting a room containing the underground chamber tomb.[50]

Rituals after entombment

Vessels or, rarely, meat offerings were sometimes also found in the fill of shaft graves or outside the diamond-roofed chambers. These objects must have been deposited after entombment but before the grave was sealed. We can expect such activities before the final filling of a shaft or burying of a chamber in a pit and should actually perceive them as being performed during the funeral. These were single actions, possibly associated with grave closure. It is difficult to decide why some graves contained traces of such rituals, while others did not. The custom appeared in subadult (but not infant) and adult burials, but without any regularity, and was limited to shafts and constructed chambers.

Complete animals were sacrificed and buried in front of the entrance to the tomb in special circumstances. Such accompanying animal burials are almost invariably associated with vaulted chamber tomb burials. Equids, most often donkeys, and young dog burials are known from at least five sites in the Upper Khabur.[51] The animals must have been sacrificed especially for the funeral as their complete articulated skeletons, lying on the side, were buried in the dromoi in front of the entrances to the chambers.[52] A primary burial of a young dog was laid against the entrance to the chamber in a dromos at Tell Arbid. Similar dog burials are also known from other sites.

Although equids are well-known from elite burials in different periods, those from the Upper Khabur sites do not present a straightforward official, high-rank relationship. They seem to be associated primarily with a select group of deceased buried in the chamber tombs, individually or collectively. After being transformed into ancestors, the most important family representatives (clan leaders?) were probably commemorated with sacrificial animals and a series of post-funeral rituals. It has been hypothesized elsewhere that the dissemination of the custom of equid and/or dog burials in private tombs could be associated with the ritual killing of a donkey to seal an alliance between the king of Mari and the Amorite tribal leaders coming from precisely this area (the Idamaraz region) in the 18th century BC, reported in a letter written by Ibal-Addu from Ašlakka, a

[46] Kelly-Buccellati 2004.

[47] Maeir and Garfinkel 1992.

[48] Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, 322.

[49] leilan.yale.edu/about-project/excavations/qarni-lim-palace.

[50] Valentini 2003, unpublished.

[51] Tell Arbid, Urkeš: Wissing 2017, 63, Ill. 79, Ašnakkum: Tunca et al. 2018, 153, pl. 185, Tell Mohammed Diyab: Nicolle 2012, 134–136, Figs. 9–10). At Šubat Enlil, a dog

skeleton was found in a double burial in pit with mud-brick covering (Weiss et al. 1990, 555).

[52] At Tell Arbid, a disarticulated but complete skeleton was buried in a pit in front of the dromos; the chamber tomb contained secondary burials of four people; it seems that both the human and the equid remains were transferred from a primary burial place and reburied in this grave.

town which may have been situated in the vicinity of Tell Arbid.[53] Other sacrificial animals are also listed in this and other letters bringing up this subject: A puppy, kid or calf, but they are rejected in favor of the donkey.[54]

Although the context of this ceremony is not funerary, it is the only mention of a ritual killing of a donkey in this period and region. From the context of the letter, this ritual seems very appropriate to both sides of this ceremony (the king and the leaders); however, it remained comprehensible only in the tribal environment of northern Mesopotamia. This official ritual of slaying a donkey in an official context has been interpreted as connecting tribal affiliation with a ritual system of alliances, ancestor veneration and political belonging. In a private context, it would have fulfilled the same role on a family- or clan-level.[55] Even if this co-appearance of a donkey sacrifice in the burials and in the official alliance ritual is a coincidence, a link between the accompanying equid burials and unofficial, kinship-oriented rituals is very clear from the archaeological evidence in this region.

Post-funeral rituals

The dromos or free space left in front of the entrance to the chamber tombs was also used as a place for post-funeral offerings. From several to over a dozen vessels, sometimes also meat cuts, were found inside the dromoi at many sites. These vessels (typically Khabur-ware jars or pots), possibly containing liquids or food, were deposited in front of the entrance, usually on three different levels of the dromos fill. The vaulted chambers were designed to host more than one burial and they were reopened to introduce a new interment. The number of offerings in the dromos did not correspond to the number of burials, so it does not seem to be related to successive burial ceremonies. In some cases, additional later burials were interred in the dromos (often on a higher level than the tomb floor), but the offerings were continued regardless of this. It is difficult to discern in these cases between closure rituals and commemorative cyclical rituals involving depositions. The latter explanation seems more justified: Chamber tombs were intended for multiple use and one can hardly assume that they would be closed at some point

and finishing rituals performed. Deposition of offerings continued even after additional burials had appeared in the dromos. Moreover, little is known about grave closure ceremonies at this time as opposed to what is known about contemporary *kispum* commemoration rituals mentioning food and drink, offered to the ancestors on different occasions.[56] Coming back to the burial place, reopening a shaft in front of it, burying a food offering and, perhaps, evoking the names of the ancestors, as in the official *kispum* ceremony, was probably aimed at sustaining contact with the deceased rather than the usual care for the dead, intended to keep the deceased at rest and away from the living.[57]

Whether post-funeral rituals were performed at graves of other types cannot be ascertained with any certainty, but it is reasonable to assume that if access to some graves was, on principle, limited or even obstructed, then grave structures inherently destined for reopening would also have plausibly been destined for post-funeral actions of this kind. These rituals were probably focused on a certain part (representation) of a family or clan and their aim was primarily commemorating ancestors and legitimizing the lineage. At Urkeš, this relationship between the living and ancestral groups was also manifested in a tendency to locate collective burials inside the houses, unlike individual burials, which were often outside the built-up areas. Thus, the connection between post-funeral rituals and the household is very clear.

Bone manipulation was another characteristic trait of post-funeral rituals in this particular period. It was not a normative but, nevertheless, an important element of post-funeral rites noted at most of the sites in the Upper Khabur region during the MBA. The most frequent case was pushing aside earlier inhumations to make place for a new interment in the chamber. Skeletons were also removed after body decomposition had taken place and were reburied, sometimes only partly; chamber tombs that had been emptied are also testimony to processes of bone relocation. Secondary burials, partial skeletons, and symbolic single bones have also been discovered in the MBA graves. Kharobi interpreted some of these practices as manifold intentional ritual actions: Simultaneous and/or successive body deposition involving push-

[53]　Finet 1993: 135–142.

[54]　Wygnańska 2017.

[55]　Durand 2008; Ristvet: 2014, 103, 128.

[56]　Tsukimoto 1985; Jacquet 2005; Wygnańska 2014.

[57]　Wygnańska 2014.

ing aside older burials; removing all or some of the human bones from a grave with no clear intention of new deposition; picking up some bones for possible reburial elsewhere; secondary deposition of all or some of the bones; and inclusion of single human bones in another burial as a memorial.[58] Even pushing aside old bones to make place for a new burial was not merely a practical aspect, but a meaningful ritual practice involving the relocation of the already decomposed human remains and continuous physical contact between the living and the dead. The more so, bones that had been swept away were not bereft of their grave goods (at least, not all of them). Ritualized fragmentation and intermingling of skeletons were parts of the process of becoming ancestors.[59]

Tell Brak (ancient Nagar), an important urban center in the 3rd millennium BC, located at the heart of the Khabur basin, stands out from this fairly homogenous picture of burial customs. No Khabur-ware period graves have been found there to date, despite the fact that the site was occupied during this period.[60] It is a vast site, only partly excavated, and the MBA settlement, which had shrunk in size compared to the earlier periods, might not be well recognized. Nevertheless, the absence of MBA graves is surprising, considering that at other Upper Khabur sites, they were found in almost every trench that was opened.

Further to the southeast of the Khabur basin, several sites along the Tigris have yielded MBA remains among others. These localities are also within the Khabur-ware pottery distribution zone. However, parallel burial practices were observed only at Ashur. Inhabitants of this important urban center buried their dead in a practically unchanged form from the 19th to the 15th century BC. Earlier, 3rd millennium BC practices are less known and it seems that residential burials grew in number only after the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.[61] Fires made in the upper layers of the shafts in some of the burials were observed as a specific rite that was a local tradition which had already been practiced in the 3rd millennium BC and continued in the 2nd millennium; this rite has not been attested elsewhere.[62] The custom of constructing vaulted chamber tombs spread in Ashur at the same time that Khabur-ware pottery became prevalent at the dawn of the 2nd millennium BC.[63] Apart from the grave types known from Khabur basin sites, sherd and vessel burials for adults were introduced. But these types appeared relatively late in the 16th century BC, foretelling perhaps a new burial tradition. It merits note that the prevalence of ceramic containers for burial purposes finds its best parallel in the Middle Euphrates region south of Ashur.

Grave inventories from Ashur were highly differentiated compared to those from the Upper Khabur region. They ranged from none whatsoever to rich and plentiful equipment. An unparalleled accumulation of wealth was apparently associated with individual economic standing, resulting from active involvement of some of the city inhabitants in international trade. Indeed, merchant burials are identifiable based on their grave inventories.[64] Characteristically, trade-related objects, such as weights, were buried with their owners. Remarkably, there was no correlation between the amount of energy invested in grave construction and the ostentation of the grave goods. The primary function of elaborate chamber burials seems again to be correlated mostly with house burials and commemoration of ancestors. Those whose status was distinguished by elevated position-related grave inventories (diadems, silver medallions, wealth accumulation) were often buried in pits near important buildings. Status-related personal equipment (also characteristic of the Khabur area sites) was represented by weapon sets (axe-heads, spearheads, daggers); its occurrence did not always relate directly to a high economic standing.

There is a series of sites yielding Khabur-Ware pottery and evidence of MBA settlement, but no intramural graves. These are Tell Taya,[65] Hamad Āġa as-Saġīr[66] and Tell al-Rimah.[67] Located along

58   Kharobi and Buccellati 2017.

59   Cradic 2017.

60   Oates et al. 1997.

61   Hockmann 2010, 89.

62   Haller 1954, 10–11, Fig. 4.

63   Hockmann 2010, 88–89. False vaulting was used initially in tomb construction, to be replaced by barrel vaulting toward the 15th century BC.

64   Calmeyer 1977; Hockmann 2010, 88.

65   Reade 1967, 256–257. This site was settled in the 18th century BC after a period of hiatus.

66   Spanos 1992.

67   Dalley 1984, 124. Two graves at Tell al-Rimah were found associated with a vaulted building dated to the very early 2nd millennium BC but included a complete Ninevite 5 vessel from the early 3rd millennium BC. Ristvet interprets it, unconvincingly, as an heirloom (2104, 141).

the Tigris north of Ashur, at the northern edge of the Sinjar range, these sites represent a gap in the otherwise consistent picture of MBA funerary customs of this part of Mesopotamia.

3.1.3 Bakr Awa – the easternmost example of practices known from Khabur basin

Bakr Awa in the Shahrizor plain in the western Zagros foothills (modern day Iraqi Kurdistan) is a recently excavated northern Mesopotamian site that adds to the general picture of burial customs known from the Jezireh, being on the easternmost fringe of the territory in which they are known to have been practiced. The site is currently an isolated outlier on the map of MBA funerary customs distribution. This may result from the state of research and more similar discoveries from the area should be expected.

An array of local, northern and some southern Mesopotamian characteristic traits was observed at Bakr Awa. The site was occupied continuously from the EBA to the MBA, but the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC was characterized by easily recognizable innovation: The adoption of new building techniques and house plans from Babylonia and the lower Diyala region.[68] Initially, during MBA I, infant vessel burials and vaulted tombs were located under the floors of inhabited houses, while pits and cists were distributed between the houses outside the living quarters.[69] During the early 2nd millennium BC, a shift was observed from the house burial tradition to intramural cemeteries. It might have been a consequence of a decrease in settlement size and a change in its character. Most of the graves from that time were pits furnished with modest grave goods, although richer burials continued to be interred within the living quarters.[70] Vaulted tombs at Bakr Awa were an MBA I hallmark, unlike most other Khabur basin sites where they appeared later, in the MBA II. There was rich evidence of bone manipulation practices also characteristic of the Upper Khabur burial customs; they were associated with relocation of the decomposed or partly decomposed bodies in the vaulted tombs and secondary or partial burials.[71] The chamber tombs were associated with

collective burials and provided with post-funeral offerings: Pottery vessels and the bones of goats and a pig were found in the dromoi of the chamber tombs; an accompanying dog burial was also found in one of the dromoi.[72] Ancestor veneration at Bakr Awa may have been associated with a clay altar in the main hall of one of the houses, similar to practices observed at Ur (see below).[73]

3.1.4 Sites in the Mesopotamian Middle Euphrates

Urban centers

The urban centers on the Middle Euphrates, such as Mari (Tell Hariri), Terqa (Tell Ashara) and Haradum (Khirbet el-Diniye), present a different picture of funerary customs, although clearly within the same cultural sphere of the Upper Mesopotamia during the MBA. Both Mari and Terqa witnessed partial abandonment and a rearrangement of the urban plan at the turn of the 3rd and the 2nd millennia BC, despite evidenced continuity of settlement. Haradum, the third of the excavated MBA settlements in the Middle Euphrates, was built from scratch in the 18th century BC.[74]

Burial customs changed gradually in Mari and Terqa during the so-called "Amorite period."[75] The newly founded Haradum lacked graves, apart from infant burials interred in household vessels under house floors; it would suggest a separate cemetery located *extra muros*.[76]

Spatial distribution

Some of the graves from the early 2nd millennium BC were found under house floors, some were dug in earlier MBA ruins, and they were also found in clusters near important sacral or secular buildings. These buildings or areas had often already been abandoned, but their quality as a memorial still attracted people with the task of having to bury their dead – burial location was one way to reflect elevated status. It was noted that specific rooms in household structures might have been preferred as a burial ground in Mari; multiple burials, for example, were concentrated in one of the rooms in the *Grande Résidence*. This feature corresponds well with the southern-Mesopotamian tendency of

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68   Miglus 2016, 231.
69   Miglus 2016, 233–234, Fig. 4.
70   Miglus 2016, 233.
71   Fetner 2015, 2018.
72   Miglus 2016, 233.

73   Miglus et al. 2013, Fig. 16.
74   Roualt 2001; Nassar 2016.
75   For Mari: Nassar 2016; for Terqa: Kelly-Buccellati and Shelby 1977–1978, 11–12; Roualt 2001.
76   Kepinski-Lecomte 1992, 14.

locating burials under a so-called main hall. Clusters of burials were sometimes gathered around one specific burial, possibly in a reflection of a kin relationship.[77] The distribution of burials was haphazard with regard to age.[78] The burial clusters, whether in important or more everyday contexts, were often used continuously, despite the fact that the placing of earlier burials was not exactly known, as indicated by the damage to some of them done by new graves.

Grave types

Cists and mud-brick chambers were abandoned in favor of jars and clay coffins (only one mud-brick burial was attributed to this period) at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. Jar burials were now used for all age groups and, indeed, the high frequency of ceramic burial containers is a benchmark for the MBA in the Middle Euphrates. Simple pit burials were in use at the same time. Burials were almost always primary and individual. Bone manipulation was practically not attested, unique secondary burials being an exception. Grave inventories were rather pauperized in comparison with the 3rd millennium assemblages; many of the burials were deprived of any kind of grave goods, although there were also several graves containing distinguishing precious equipment.[79] With a few exceptions, weapons were missing from graves and those few that are known were typical MBA I examples (e.g. duck-bill axes). Vessels, if found, were often in kits, consisting of a jar, a goblet and a cup. Animal offerings were rarely deposited in graves; accompanying animal burials were, however, absent from the MBA burials.[80]

The most striking, in comparison with the northern sites, is an absence of any archaeological evidence of post-funeral rituals, considering that rituals such as *kispum*, meant to provision and commemorate the deceased kings in Mari, are well-known specifically from the Mari texts.[81] Since we know of the official *kispum* rituals practiced in Mari aimed at commemorating the royal family and the tribe at large to which the Amorite kings belonged, we may posit that such rituals were also practiced in the private sphere.[82] However, vessels and faunal remains were found outside the graves only in a few cases, suggesting some additional post-entombment rituals.[83] The lack of clear archaeological evidence suggests that such rituals were, perhaps, not practiced at the grave.

To sum up, in terms of the choice of burial place, the picture from Mari and Terqa is consistent with that known from the Upper Khabur basin. A growing trend for residential interments and the continuation of small (family?) graveyards within a settlement indicate a need for affiliation with particular descent groups. It should be pointed out that the intramural trend alone was also noted to some extent in earlier periods at Mari, while the visible connection of burials with houses was an innovation.[84] A change in burial place concept was observable here.

Further funerary rituals are puzzling in view of the absence of collective burials and family chamber tombs, and the absence of secondary or partial burials. Assuming that the deceased had been buried within inhabited space and that post-funeral offerings were indeed conducted at home during special ceremonies, then these rituals might have substituted for a built family vault; all the ancestors may have been evoked and commemorated during such a ceremony.

Isolated cemeteries

In addition to urban centers, such as Mari with its intramural burials, there were also several extensive cemeteries without an associated settlement, such as Baghouz, Shuwaymiyeh and 'Usiyeh in the Middle Euphrates area. Although they may seem unusual in a Mesopotamian landscape, it is only due to their underrepresentation in regular excavation research. Field surveys of the region indicated that there are many more extramural burial grounds with cairns dated to various periods along the Euphrates, especially around Mari.[85] Such cemeteries, located in agriculturally margin-

77   Nassar 2016, Figs. 9, 10.
78   Nassar 2016, 278.
79   Jean-Marie 1999, 32–42.
80   Equid burials were found only in the early periods of the settlement (Margueron et al. 2015, 143).
81   Tallon 1978; Tsukimoto 1985, 159–183; jacquet 2005, 2012.

82   Jacquet 2005.
83   As in Tomb T480 (Jean-Mari 1999, pl. 69); Nassar 2016, 275.
84   Jean-Marie 1999, 5–13.
85   Geyer and Monchambert 2003, 162–171.

al areas, were used by nomadic groups in various periods.

The cemeteries in Bagouz, 'Usiyeh and Shuweymiyeh are dated to the first half of the 2nd millennium BC and consist of concentrations of tumuli graves with dolmens and cairns.[86]

Sited on river crossings and hilltops, they made for excellent territorial markers for nomadic tribal groups. Various interpretations have been proposed regarding the identity of the proprietors of the cemeteries in the Middle Euphrates: The Mari elites evidently lacking MBA elite intramural burials, pastoralists settling down the Middle Euphrates or nomads living in the desert.[87] The distance from any settlement, the grave distribution reflecting clan organization and the grave inventories would point to a nomadic origin of the cemetery users. Especially because these marginal arid zones were home to pastoral nomads, as mentioned by cuneiform texts.

Spatial distribution of graves

The burial ground of Baghouz yielded around 300 burials in the excavated area Z, with 175 burials dated to the MBA.[88] The graves were distributed around three dominating natural hilltops, topped by the biggest and apparently most prestigious burials. Other larger and smaller graves were arranged in 17 discrete grave clusters around the big tumuli tombs on the mounds' tops, possibly reflecting tribal or clan hierarchy. The graves were reused and some later burials were added to the already existing concentrations, so we certainly cannot speak of one uniform tribal burial ground.[89]

Burial mounds at 'Usiyeh in area B contained a mix of grave types arranged in groups, each of which may have represented a societal unit. Excavations in one of the mounds revealed: A central stone-built chamber surrounded by pit graves containing adult and child burials, and two mud-brick chambers, one of which contained multiple interments.[90] The arrangement of burials resembles that of northern Mesopotamian household

grave concentrations, also probably reflecting family units.

Grave types

In terms of grave types, the cemeteries included burial mounds with cairns of different size and pits cut into the bedrock and covered with stone slabs. At Baghouz, the tombs consisted of stone-lined pits covered by stone slabs, and – in the case of the biggest tombs – with a soil mound surrounded by a stone circle on the surface. At 'Usiyeh and Shuweymiyeh, the mud-brick chambers were surrounded by mud-brick enclosure walls [Fig. 8] and covered with mounds that have mostly been eroded.[91] Horizontal dromoi led to chamber entrances in the biggest tumuli graves. Smaller graves were entered only from the top. In some cases, mud-brick chambers with a typically MBA corbel vaulting were also found inside the grave pits. These, however, had no traces of planned reopening. Post-entombment or post-funeral ritual-related installations were found in the vicinity of the burials at 'Usiyeh.

Demographics and deposition mode

Not much is known about how the bodies were deposited, nor about the age or gender ratio. No infant burials were reported from such cemeteries. Some of the deceased were probably laid on their side on a wooden funerary bed [Fig. 9.1-4]. Individual, primary adult burials were mainly deposited in these graves, although some of the larger tombs at 'Usiyeh contained multiple burials.[92] There was no indication of bone manipulation practices, although an anthropological analysis was not undertaken.[93] One could expect at least secondary burials in this presumed nomadic cemetery.

Grave goods and rituals during entombment

Most of the burials were equipped with sets of three vessels, a custom also well attested in the

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[86]   A date in the MBA I or early MBA II is based on the pottery and weapon types, particularly fenestrated duck-bill axes (PHILIP 1995, 142–143; KEPINSKI 2010, 166).

[87]   GATES 1988, 85; HROUDA 1990; KEPINSKI 2010.

[88]   There were many more burial mounds spotted in the area of foothills of Jebel Baghouz in Syria. The cemetery extended 8 km along the Middle Euphrates (DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1948, 4).

[89]   Some of the burials were dated to the Parthian times (DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1948).

[90]   OGUCHI and OGUCHI 2005, 167–168.

[91]   KEPINSKI 2010, 166.

[92]   NUMOTO and OKADA 1987.

[93]   Due to the fact that many of the graves had been disturbed or reused, such practices might be difficult to detect.

Fig. 8 Shuwaimiyeh: One of the MBA mud-brick cairns from an isolated nomadic cemetery (Photo F.M. Stępniowski).

Middle Euphrates graves from the settlements. In terms of functionality, grave inventories from Baghouz fit a general MBA trend with vessels and objects associated with provisioning the deceased, weapons and rare examples of personal jewelry. Metal strainers, associated in the Upper Khabur area with beer consumption, were quite frequent. At Baghouz, they appeared often in kits with tall jars (perhaps also used to serve beer). The inventories also signify status differentiation. In addition, the grave equipment from Baghouz is different in many aspects from what was found in the intramural graves in the nearest settlement, in Mari. Of the burials at Baghouz, 13 % contained weapons, mostly fenestrated duck-bill axe-heads that were widely distributed in western Syria and the Levant and even in the eastern Nile Delta, but were very rare in Mari graves [Fig. 9.2,4].[94] Axe-heads occurred in sets with spearheads and daggers characteristic of the MBA II A phase of "warrior burials" in the Levant.[95] Similar weapon sets were found at Chagar Bazar, but the graves there were of later date and the weapon types differed. It indi-

cates that, unlike the settled environment of the Middle Euphrates, weaponry was a typical male, status-related funerary object category in the nomadic cemeteries. This corroborates an emphasis on the male status depicted as a warrior in the MBA I Levant[96] and, possibly, stands in opposition to the status of city dwellers buried in Mari or Terqa. Wooden furniture sets found in Baghouz were unique, on a Mesopotamian scale: Beds, round tables and stools were found in several dolmens, all without good parallels outside of MBA Jericho.[97] These were associated only with the most important burials in dolmens, one of the reasons why finds like that are unique.[98] Distribution of the objects inside the grave points to rituals performed during the funeral before a tomb closure. The more intricate they were, the bigger the burial structure was. The deceased was laid on the wooden bier, with their personal belongings (weapons, personal jewelry); the grave was further furnished with furniture (stools, tables) and vessels distributed around the bier; an animal was slaughtered for a food offering, cuts of which were later deposited

[94] GARFINKEL 2001, 155–156.

[95] PHILIP 1995, 142.

[96] HALLOTE 2003, 106.

[97] DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1948, 37–38, Figs. 42, 44; HROUDA 1990.
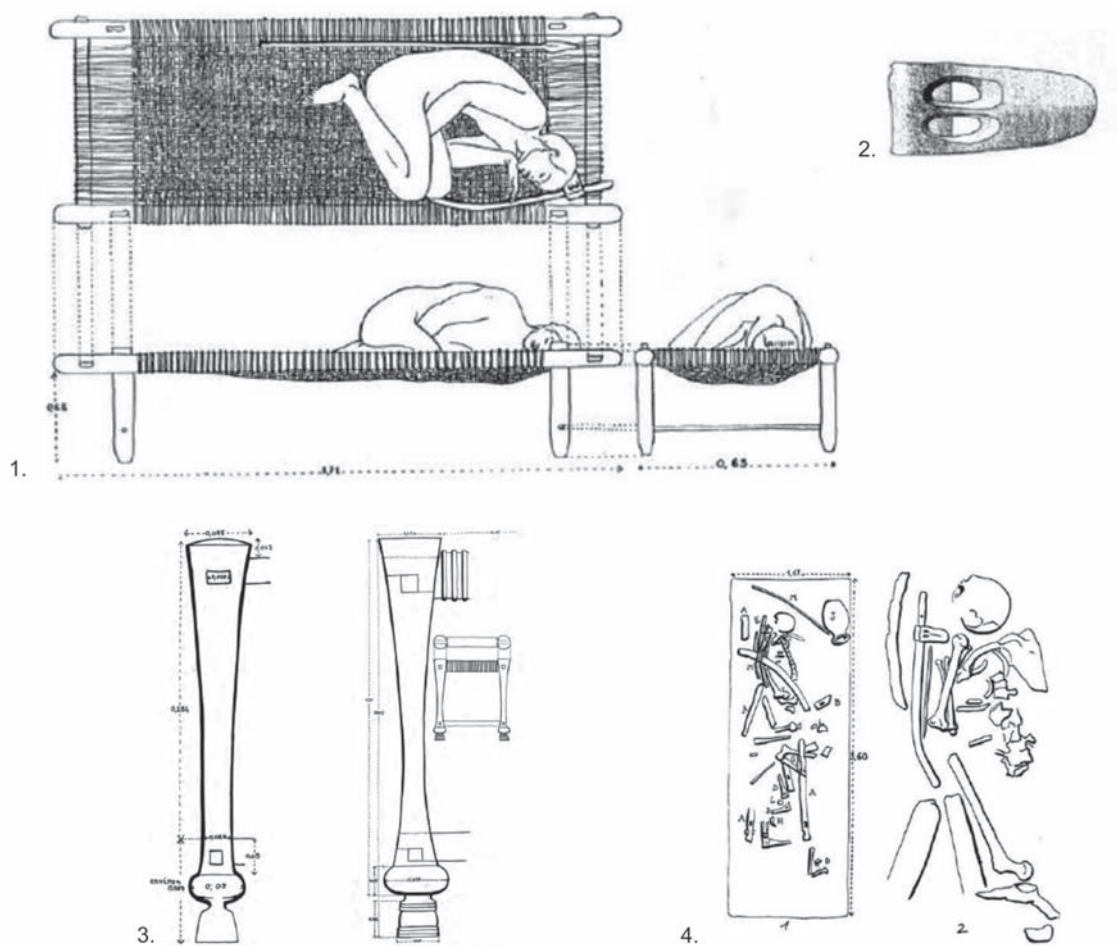
[98] DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1948, 31.

Fig. 9 Grave inventories from the tumuli graves in Baghouz: Elements of furniture (1. Bed; 3. Stool), 2. a duck-bill axe-head and 3. a grave interior (after DU MESNIL DU BUISSON 1948).

on a table. Time and resources invested in a funeral like this were considerably higher than in the case of simple burials, and one can imagine that such a funeral must have gathered the tribe for longer at the cemetery.

Post-entombment and post-funeral rituals

There were no evident traces of post-funeral ritual activities in Baghouz. Several cases where grave goods (pottery incense burners included) were found inside and outside the chamber show that post-entombment rites might have taken place. These finds were only associated with the biggest burials and suggest more complex burial rituals.

At 'Usiyeh, however, a separate underground unit, probably associated with post-funeral cyclical rituals, was found near the cemetery in area A.[99] It

probably served the whole community using the cemetery.[100] Other features, including a stone platform and benches, accompanied some of the other tombs, indicating that some rituals were performed in the vicinity of the grave at 'Usiyeh.

3.1.6 Isolated burial grounds in Jebel Bishri

Twenty-five more cairn fields and 398 individual cairns were noted west of the upper course of the Euphrates, in the foothills of Jebel Bishri.[101] Most of the cemeteries found were only surveyed, thus, the dataset is not detailed.[102] There were burial cairns built of stones and tumuli grave clusters without links to any permanent settlement, spotted in the northwestern part of the Jebel Bishri area [Fig. 10].[103] Benches and platforms found next to some of the tombs in the Jebel Bishri area were

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[99] KILLICK and BLACK 1985, 226.
[100] FUJI and MATSUMOTO 1987; RISTVET 2014, 132.
[101] FUJI and ADACHI 2010; FUJI et al. 2010.

[102] FUJI and ADACHI 2010.
[103] AL-KHABOUR 2017.

Fig. 10 Stone cairn from the MBA nomadic cemetery in the Jebel Bishri area (After AL-KHABOUR 2017 Fig. 3).

possibly associated with practicing around-funeral rituals and the visibility of cemeteries in the field also enabled the marking of the area, returning for consecutive burials and, possibly, commemorative rituals. Similarly as the regions west of the Middle Euphrates, this marginal zone was home to pastoralists in various periods and such cemeteries are not limited to the MBA. Pastoralists in Jebel Bishri were attested textually from the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC; they were even associated with the Amorites, but the term is used to refer to pastoralists in general, not to an ethnic entity.[104]

Isolated cemeteries apparently attested to specific burial traditions, combining elements of settled material culture known from both the north and south of Mesopotamia (pottery, beer kits, weapons) with distinctive nomadic elements (isolation of cemeteries, tumulus-tomb concept, internal grave arrangement around the most important burials). Some typically MBA Mesopotamian ritual variables were also observed: Emphasis on kinship and the presence of post-funeral commemorative activities. These features are, as far as the subject has been explored, associated specifically with the MBA in the isolated cemeteries.

Remarkably, there were tangible cultural connections to western Syria and the Levant that were not found in Mesopotamian graves of the period and which placed the cemeteries within a wider nomadic milieu of the period. In fact, areas west of the Euphrates, in the desert stretching between Syria and the southern Levant, provide more examples of similar cemeteries.[105] Kepinski pointed to the similarity of the MBA burial mounds and their inventories known from the Arabian Peninsula and suggested their association with the process of pastoralists during the early MBA.[106] The similarities in burial customs displayed over these great distances did not equate to direct people movements but reflected a constructed shared ideology of interlinked tribal groups. Clan or tribe affiliation overlapped the ethnos concept in this case.[107]

3.2 Funerary practices at southern Mesopotamian sites

The data from southern Mesopotamian sites are not as detailed and complete as those from the north. One of the reasons is that, like in Ur, only the furnished graves were published out of a large number of residential MBA burials. Thus, we are deprived of a significant share of data. Even so, one can still compare some of the most significant ritual variables.

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[104] DE BOER 2014, 163–165.
[105] ASSAF 1967, 55–68; KEPINSKI 2010, 167.
[106] KEPINSKI 2010, 168.

[107] HØJLUND 1989, also on the Amorite tribal origin of the Dilmun state at Bahrain.

Spatial distribution of graves

Most of the southern sites, mainly big cities, had already seen a growth in the number of residential burials at the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. The richest and most well-published funerary record comes from Ur.[108] Over 200 private graves were found, mostly under the floors of inhabited houses in two extensive residential quarters.[109] The first residential burials were attested in Ur at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, but they became customary at the beginning of the 2nd millennium. Numerous burials were also found at Sippar-Amnanum (Tell ed-Der), but only a few of these were ever published.[110] Most of the graves were distributed in four occupational phases under and around a rich private residence belonging to a high priest, referred to as a "Central Building" dated to the 17th century BC; many other graves (dated to the 20th–17th centuries BC) were found directly below the houses and in areas adjacent to the inhabited buildings. At the end of this period, when some of the houses had already been abandoned, graves continued to be dug into the ruins. In Uruk, graves were found under private houses (19th–17th centuries BC), while 18 of them were made in the palace of Skinkashid, a local ruler, at
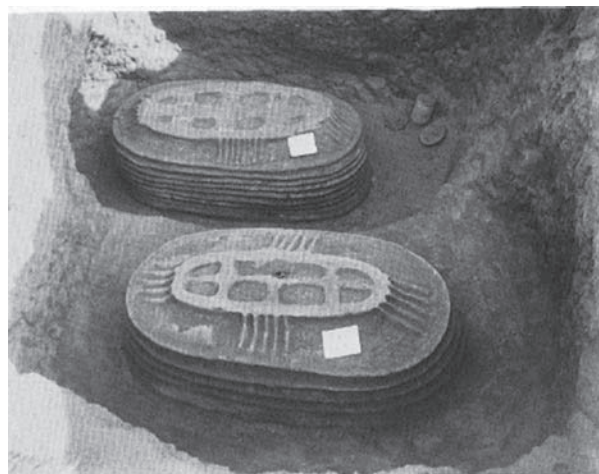

Fig. 11 Terracotta coffins in house burials from Ur
(After Woolley and Mallowan 1976, pl. 48.d)

the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.[111] At Larsa, the published graves come from private elite residences located near official buildings and temples. These were rich houses owned by merchants, walled off from the other districts (unlike the cases of the sites described above).[112]

The data are not sufficient, but it seems that there was a hierarchy in house burial locations: Chamber tombs with adult burials were located

Fig. 12 Terracotta vessel child grave and a "hutch-rabbit" container under the floor of one of the houses in Ur (After Woolley and Mallowan 1976, Pl. 29.a).

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[108] Woolley and Mallowan 1976, 195–213.

[109] Many more graves were actually discovered but only the well-preserved ones containing some kind of grave goods were published.

[110] De Meyer 1978, 57–129, 1984, 1–62; Burger-Heinrich 1989, 47–68; Gasche 1989a, 1989b; . The site was located close to the well-known ancient city of Sippar, from where burials were only briefly mentioned in publications (Scheil 1902, 55–60; al-Jadir and Rajib 1983/1984; al-Jadir 1987).

[111] Boehmer et al. 1995.

[112] Huot 1991, 7; Battini-Villand 1999, 239.

Fig. 13 Household chamber tomb with vessels found outside the grave leaning against the entrance (After WOOLLEY and MALLOWAN 1976, pl. 48.b).

under the most official part of the house, often a rear room (designated as a "main hall" in Ur). Other adults and infants were interred in neighboring rooms; poor graves deprived of any goods were found outside the house. In Ur, the rooms called "main halls" were sometimes furnished with characteristic facilities, such as mud-brick tables, which could have acted as altars, niches and/or clay podia with decoration resembling the front of a temple, interpreted as domestic chapels [Fig. 14].[113] Such domestic chapels, although not reserved exclusively for this purpose, were a pref-

erential location for underfloor burials, particularly the vaulted chamber tombs. Chamber tombs were found in many of the excavated houses in Ur; in some cases, there was more than one tomb per house.[114] They were often built below unpaved parts of chapel floors in order to facilitate access in case of subsequent burials. Other grave types were often dug next to the vaulted chambers, sometimes taking up the entire walking space within the chapel. In some cases, a set of vessels was found in the chapels, arranged on the tables/altars or on the floor in front of them. A privileged grave location, whether under the floor of a domestic chapel or in the main hall, can be assumed to signify the special status of the deceased and their familial position. Hardly any of the well-equipped burials were found in an insignificant location.

Grave types

Most of the grave types had limited access. The dead were buried in pits (usually the poorest burials without grave goods) and in various ceramic containers: Terracotta coffins (most often) [Fig.11], urns, vessels (often "double pot" or "double bowl" burials) and the so-called "rabbit hutch" containers (known only from Ur and reserved for infants) buried in pits or dug in under the house floors

Fig. 14 Domestic chapel with an altar and two podia; unpaved floor fragments mark places where burials were found (After WOOLLEY and MALLOWAN 1976, pl. 43.b).

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[113]   WOOLLEY 1976, 29; LANERI 2014.

[114]   There were five chamber tombs under a rich house in Church Lane 9, located next to a Street Chapel (WOOLLEY and MALLOWAN 1976, 131).

[Fig. 12]. Apart from urns, all other types of containers seem to cut across the age categories. Those for adults were produced specially for funerary purposes and everyday storage vessels were seldom used, confirming a distinct funeral industry functioning during the MBA. It seems that shaft burials were present but rare, which is in stark contrast with northern Mesopotamian practices.

In addition, barrel vaulted-chamber tombs were found at most of the southern sites. In Ur, they were introduced as early as the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, at other sites they are known from the 18th–17th centuries BC. Southern chamber tombs were underground structures, built under the house floors.[115] That they were also reentered and reused, similar to their counterparts from northern Mesopotamia, can be inferred from the occurrence of a free, unpaved space on the floor level in front of the underground entrances and offerings left in pits or dromoi in front of them. The vaulted chamber tombs were usually associated with multiple interments, although it was not a rule. In Ur, for example, all the vaulted chamber tombs were identified as collective burials occurring almost exclusively in this type of tomb. In Uruk, however, the tombs all contained single burials except for one with a successive burial of two individuals.

Demographics and mode of deposition

Observations regarding skeletal remains and possible bone manipulation practices are biased due to insufficient anthropological research on many of the southern sites. The sex or age ratio of the deceased is not defined. Inasmuch as can be deduced from the reports, both adults and subadults were buried inside the cities, however, there was a disproportion in favor of adults represented in the household burials from Ur; it seems that adults were more likely to be buried under house floors.

Bodies were usually laid to rest in an embryonic position, in continuation of a 3rd millennium BC tradition, an orientation toward cardinal directions playing no role. A curiosity of Sippar-Amnanum is an atypical body arrangement in the graves: Both adults and subadults were laid to rest in a supine position with legs and arms contracted.[116] This unusual feature may point to a specific status or origin of the deceased buried in this way.[117]

Individual burials were prevalent by far. In Ur, 38 graves out of the total were identified as collective ones, comprising, for the most part, from 3 to 11 individuals. About 10 % of the graves from Sippar-Amnanum contained collective burials (not more than three individuals per grave). This proportion generally corresponds with the number of collective burials in the north at that time. Additionally, the number of the deceased is between 2 and 12, at the most. Multiple burials are characteristic, yet not normative for the overall population.

Grave inventories and rituals during entombment

The deceased were laid into the grave wrapped in mats or textiles with the head sometimes resting on clay or brick "pillows" reminiscent of a sleeping position (this feature was noted in Ur). They were sometimes deposited with their personal belongings: Jewelry (very rarely toggle pins) and objects that might represent their status, such as cylinder seals (relatively frequent in Ur); seldom: Cosmetic utensils, shell lamps, weights or tools. Weapons were found only occasionally. With one exception, the rare weapon finds were not clearly correlated with other prestigious burial features that could point to the high social standing of the deceased. Before the grave was sealed, the deceased were also usually provided with food: Meat offerings were rather rare, but fruit and other vegetal remains appeared instead. The presence of such ritual activities was correlated, to some extent, with the quality of the grave container, pointing possibly to the economic position of the deceased and their family.

Most of the burials had these very standardized grave goods, but there was an apparent variation in some of the grave inventories resulting from the elevated status of the deceased, for example, the economic position of the individuals engaged in trade. Rich sets were represented mostly by personal adornments of precious metals, metal or imported vessels and animal offerings, and were

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[115]   At Uruk, five out of nine vaulted chamber tombs excavated were found below the floors of Sinkashid's palace. They were constructed in the palace vaults, but just like the dug masonry tombs, they were fitted with a free space or a cor-

ridor enclosed by mud-brick walls in front of the entrances, distinguishing this ritually relevant area.

[116]   GASCHE 1989a, 62.

[117]   UCKO 1969, 275.

found in adult and subadult graves. In Sippar-Amnanum, for example, some of the rich burials came from the house of a priest, Ur-Utu, apparently a person of high rank.[118] The richer grave inventories were generally associated with a grave location below a house floor, while poorer burials where located outside the buildings.[119] Furthermore, based on the limited number of graves, it can be said that most of the precious objects came from chamber tombs and terracotta coffins, while pits were the most modest burial types. This observation points to a correlation between elaborate construction, grave location and grave inventory. Nevertheless, even the most differentiated grave inventories were still much humbler in comparison to the grave inventories from the 3rd millennium BC, for example, in Ur.

Post-entombment and post-funeral rituals

Offerings found outside the graves, especially graves with restricted access, constitute evidence of post-entombment rituals. Vessels or animal cuts were found outside ceramic containers or, rarely in the fill of shaft graves. At Sippar-Amnanum, vessels were deliberately deposited in two clusters corresponding to the head and feet of the deceased in the grave, which, in addition to the atypical supine position, could indicate the specificity of local customs. At Uruk, a dog skull was deposited outside one of the pit graves. There were also unique cases of special depositions of different objects of value outside the grave in Ur: Seals or jewelry, found regardless of grave type and age of the deceased, sometimes in "offering pits" in front of the grave. It seems that such depositions represent rituals performed during the funeral, before the burial was finally interred or the tomb closed. However, depositing offerings outside ceramic containers could be the result of insufficient space inside the containers, hence, far-reaching interpretations need to be made with caution.

Most of the post-entombment or post-funeral offerings, however, were associated with the chamber tombs, where they were found inside the

dromoi. Multiple vessels were found usually leaning against the blocked entrance to the vaults in Ur [Fig. 13]. In Larsa, deposits of this kind were found at three different levels in the dromos, left there after the tomb was closed. Animal cuts are also sometimes reported in the dromoi. Offerings were deposited not only near the grave but also sometimes in the rooms above them. As mentioned above, in some cases, a set of vessels was found in the chapel above the vault; the vessels would be arranged on the tables/altars or on the floor in front of such installations. The vaulted chambers seem to be intended for individuals distinguished in the family hierarchy, presumably associated with lineage and inheritance hierarchy. Houses were indeed inhabited by successive generations of the same families, as indicated by inheritance texts found in some houses confirming the transfer and division of the property among the sons of the deceased owner.[120] If the offerings in the chapels are considered as remains of a *kispum* ritual, then one is entitled to an interpretation of the chapels as memorials for the veneration of ancestors. Chapels were common in Ur, but several examples are also known from other southern sites, although they were never as frequent as at Ur. Offerings located concomitantly inside the dromos after tomb closure and on associated altar places may point to a complexity of rites reserved for various occasions and with different meanings, directly after the funeral and during later, sequential ceremonies. It may be added here that bone manipulation evidence was associated mainly with chamber tombs, suggesting ritual practices used in the transformation process to ancestors.

A similar picture emerges from other southern sites: Isin,[121] Kish,[122] Merkes, which is part of the Old Babylonian Babylon,[123] Tell Mohammed[124] or Al-Hiba,[125] even if a more detailed analysis is not supported by general reporting or excessive damage to the tombs themselves. A correlation between underfloor chamber tombs and collective burials was noted at Merkes and Isin. At Tell Muhammad, a clay bench and a niche were discovered in a room above a buried chamber tomb,

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[118]   Gasche 1989a, 66.

[119]   Frank 2005, 90.

[120]   Houses were indeed inhabited by successive generations of the same families as indicated by inheritance texts found in some houses and confirming the transfer and division of the property among the sons of the deceased owner (Van Mieroop 1992, 213–220).

[121]   Hrouda 1997, 186–187.

[122]   Moorey 1979, 27.

[123]   Reuther 1926.

[124]   Roaf and Postgate 1981, 216.

[125]   Al-Hiba: Excavations in Iraq 1977–78, 145–146.

marking a possible domestic chapel. Graves were rather richly furnished and two zoomorphic vessels were unique among the grave goods.

There are a few sites which depart from the standard, the same as in northern Mesopotamia. Nippur is one, yielding only a few MBA intramural burials despite the relatively wide exposure of a residential quarter and very few household chapels. The scant pit graves found within the city confines were so poor that the excavators interpreted them as "slaves' burials."[126] This suggests that there was a cemetery somewhere, either inside the city or elsewhere, where formal burial took place. Discoveries at Tell Abu Duwari (Maškan-Šapir) might provide a clue. The site was only surveyed, identifying the distribution of particular buildings and city sectors: Sacral, administrative and residential, and recording a cemetery in the southern part of the city, next to the temple sector.[127] The MBA graves were dug in the ruins of the early 2nd millennium BC domestic quarter. This cemetery was separated from other city quarters by a wall. At the same time, burials inside the houses were also practiced. Without good parallels, one is left to wonder whether the case of Maškan-Šapir is isolated or there existed separate burial grounds in addition to domestic burials in other cities as well. It may well be that we have here a case of deliberate spatial planning in the big cities, different in character from the small-scale settlements in the north.

4. The MBA Mesopotamian mortuary variability: Summary

Buried among the living

Residential burial cutting across age groups was a common feature of MBA burial practices throughout Mesopotamia. The number of burials from about 300 years of MBA occupation on various sites ranges from several dozen to 200, which means that, although not representing the entire population, they were much more numerous than in the preceding periods. This phenomenon was reported from the bulk of sites presented here.

The custom evolved – from small burial grounds comprising several individuals in MBA I (this was observed at sites in the Jezireh) to MBA II graves located under the floors of inhabited houses or in their close vicinity – throughout Mesopotamia.

An observable trend at the smaller, less densely inhabited sites of northern Mesopotamia is the location of graves during MBA II more frequently in the ruins or between buildings but still within the inhabited space. Differences of this kind may have been prompted by the nature of the settlements, differing in the various regions, or by different rules governing internal space organization in cities and in settlements of a rural type, such as Tell Arbid. This spatial proximity of members of the household – the living and the dead – is very explicit in the MBA, pointing to a continued relationship over generations.[128] The wide distribution range of this custom is indicative of the socioeconomic changes necessitating reinforcement of a household lineage through incorporation of the ancestors into it.[129]

Furthermore, the grave location reflected both horizontal and vertical social differentiation. There was a tendency, for example, to bury individuals of elevated status in prestigious places, such as in the immediate vicinity of public buildings, while collective family burials were found in connection with households. Within a household, individual burials were sometimes concentrated around a vaulted chamber tomb, often with a collective burial and, thus, reflecting family ties. Residential burial was generally nothing new in Mesopotamian mortuary practices in the earlier millennia, but the rise in the number of burials from all age groups was significant at the beginning of the 2nd millennium and may be perceived as a characteristic feature. There were also significant exceptions from the intramural rule, i.e. sites yielding atypically no underfloor burials or cemeteries. This evidence of absence is not easily explained. It does not seem to be related to an excessive density of residential agglomerations.

Multiple grave concepts

Another characteristic trait of this period is a large diversity of grave types within particular sites. There was a noticeable difference in the types attested in the north (earthen pits/shafts or mudbrick structures) and in the south (prevalence of ceramic containers), reflecting local traditions, access to resources and wealth (as exemplified by

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126   McCown et al. 1967, 147.
127   Stone 1997, 430–432; Stone and Zemansky 2004.
128   Cradic 2017, 239.
129   Laneri 2010, 121–123.

the funerary ceramic production industry blooming in southern Mesopotamia in this period). Most of the types represent the concept of a grave with an access blocked soon after burial. The multiplicity of cross-relationships was noted when it comes to the choice of grave type. To some extent, it was an age-related feature. An economic and/or elevated-status position was also reflected through the choice of a probably more costly grave container, such as terracotta coffins in the south. The general diversity of types was, however, much more difficult to interpret. In many cases, energy expenditure in constructing a tomb was not correlated with the elevated status of the deceased (recognized through grave location, richness of equipment or evidence of complex accompanying rituals); and conversely, elite burials (rich, characterized by a prestigious location) were often found in the simplest of graves. One may presume, on these grounds, that grave type diversity mirrored multifaceted social differentiation, resulting from circumstances that are sometimes not easily readable in archaeology.

The most characteristic and widespread feature of the MBA is a private tomb concept calling for a standardized mud-brick vaulted chamber with a horizontal access designed for reentering. These tombs were marked on the surface to facilitate their finding and reopening. In many regions, earlier EBA elite burial tombs had been built as aboveground structures, but wide dissemination of the standardized concept of a private, non-elite grave being visible on the surface and designed to be reopened was somehow novel.[130] Grave visibility was achieved by building a retaining wall that stuck out of the ground or by locating the tombs in underhouse vaults. Chamber tombs were meant not only to be the final resting place but were designed to enable a continued relationship with the dead. Whether dug outside the building or under the floor, vaulted chambers were often associated with collective, probably family burials. It appears that they were intended primarily for the burial of distinguished family members. This concept was disseminated in the 18th century BC and was continued until the end of the MBA period, therefore, the phenomenon coincides with a period of relative political stabilization and settlement revival in the whole region. At some sites, both in the south (Ur) and in the North (Urkeš, Ashur), the use of vaulted chamber tombs dates back to the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. The idea of using family vaults for selected deceased in rich merchant families appeared at the end of the 3rd millennium BC at a few sites along the Turkish Upper Euphrates and in Northern Mesopotamia (Titriş Höyük, Selenkahiye and Tell Taya).[131] It has been associated with the acquisition of power by wealthy private households and their need to legitimize it through solidifying a household's social memory and commemoration of ancestors in a changing sociopolitical landscape. The phenomenon occurring throughout Mesopotamia in the MBA II was, however, much more widespread in various social contexts, and although the mechanism was the same, that is, legitimizing a new social order, it was not associated only with wealthy families.

Although vaulted chamber tombs are a hallmark of MBA Mesopotamian customs, they are absent from the Middle Euphrates region. Even though there was a significant shift in burial customs observed in Mari at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, ceramic burial containers were introduced instead of the mud-brick chamber tombs so popular elsewhere in this period. The origin of this local tradition, which confuses the overall picture, is not clear. Were it not for the written sources from the city, it would be easy to interpret the burial customs as not fitting the surrounding area and representing quite a different mortuary ideology.

Quality and quantity of grave inventories

Inventories found inside the graves were pretty much standardized and did little to indicate the elevated status of the deceased. The situation was different in the case of the large and rich settlements, sites engaged in trade and the nomadic cemeteries. The economic position of the deceased in the prosperous settlements was emphasized by committing precious, often imported grave goods and trade-related objects to burial. Complex rituals and differentiated quantity and quality marked the high rank of possible tribe leaders in the nomadic burial grounds.

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[130] It cannot be ruled out that other grave types were also marked somehow but in a less durable way. Since other graves were not designed to be reopened, the issue is more problematic. We can state cautiously that vaulted chambers were the only grave types with long-lasting markings on the surface.

[131] LANERI 2010.

Additionally, there were some specific local variations in grave inventories, of apparently confined distribution, pointing to different identities not necessarily of high rank. These include, for example, the appearance of andirons/incense burners in the Upper Khabur basin graves. Such andirons seem to carry a symbolic function apparently associated with a local ritual reality not recognized elsewhere. Kelly-Buccellati associates them with the presence of Hurrian traditions in the region.[132] The frequent occurrence of beer-serving and drinking kits in the Upper Khabur graves, and here in Baghouz, suggests that there might have been an after-life symbolism associated with the beverage in some communities in northern Mesopotamia, possibly an important element of a funerary feast being one of the explanations.

Equid and/or young dog burials were also restricted to northern Mesopotamia. Potentially associated with tribal (Amorite?) rituals, they did not find their way into the tribal traditions of other regions. Although equid burials are well-known also from other periods in the Near East, it was during the MBA that they became so strongly correlated with collective burials in the vaulted chambers.[133] The equid sacrifice may have been associated with ancestral cult rituals in this period as an expression of belonging to a particular ritual system.[134] This custom was widespread on sites in the Upper Khabur area but was restricted only to selected burials, often collective and always in vaulted chambers. The kind of distinction it possibly denoted could not be inferred from grave form or inventory but leadership in a clan-like organization seems probable. Unlike Mesopotamia, the equid burials at Tell Dab'a, often interred in pairs, were associated with male individuals and were apparently markers of high status. Thus, it seems that although equids in private tombs were foreign to the Egyptian tradition, and the concept might have been borrowed from the Levant or even northern Mesopotamia, the understanding of this symbol differed to a degree at this site.

The context of the dog burials was different from that of the equids. They were consistently, and importantly, young individuals. Unlike the case of the equids, there was no direct correlation between dog sacrifices and particular grave types, thus, suggesting a different function, possibly associated with chthonic deities.[135] Such accompanying animal burials are practically not attested in the South at this time, but they were widely distributed in the Levant and are known from the eastern Nile Delta, where they appeared in the Middle Kingdom period graves at Tell Dab'a.[136]

Another distinct feature in the north were weapons as social markers. Warrior-type burials generally continued in northern Mesopotamia until the end of the MBA, unlike the Levant, where they ceased to be common after the initial MB II.[137] The presence of weapons in graves is indicative presumably of an idealized warrior self-perception of male members of the northern communities and might have been the result of a persistent instability caused by political fragmentation and intertribal rivalry in this region.[138] Significantly, weapons were used as a male status marker also in the nomadic cemeteries in the Middle Euphrates. In the south, we see merchants' sets: Weights and objects associated with trading activities, as a sort of "counterpart" to the warriors' equipment.

Post-funeral practices and ancestral worship as characteristic elements of the MBA burial program

Evidence of post-funeral rituals enacted in different periods after entombment (during the funeral or after the grave was sealed) associated with private burials is another distinguishing feature of the period. The emphasis on dissemination in a private context is again very important here, as such rituals were elite-centered in the 3rd millennium BC.[139] There were apparently different kinds of ceremonies conducted directly after the entombment and traces of these are associated with different burial types. There were also specific post-funeral rituals performed predominantly in connection with collective burials in vaulted chambers

[132] KELLY-BUCCELLATI 2004.

[133] WAY 2011.

[134] RISTVET 2014, 103, 128.

[135] WYGNAŃSKA 2017.

[136] FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2010; WAY 2011.

[137] PHILIP 1995.

[138] RISTVET 2014: 38.

[139] Although textual mentions from 3rd millennium BC cuneiform sources and archaeological evidence (terracotta pipes for drink/food offerings in some tombs) suggest that post-depositional rituals of the *kispum* kind were practiced to some extent as well, mostly to commemorate elite ancestors (TSUKIMOTO 1985; JONKER 1995; WINTER 1999; KATZ 2007).

throughout Mesopotamia, both in urban and rural environments. These rituals were practiced sequentially, although their frequency and longevity after the funeral are difficult to estimate (it might be that in some cases, these were just very complex closure rituals). Hence, the presumption that they were material evidence of the *kispum* ritual aimed at ancestral commemoration. In the palace, the king and his officials took part in rituals and offerings of food and drink made during different phases of the moon, whereas similar rites took place in private homes or at the family tombs to feed the deceased and sustain a relationship with them.[140] Mentions of the *kispum* for the kings in the Mari archives helped to explain the nature of such rituals, whereas the archaeological funerary record indicated its widespread private dimension.

Unlike the Levantine sites, where collective tombs housed dozens of burials, the Mesopotamian MBA collective internments in vaulted chambers never exceeded two to around a dozen individuals buried in a tomb. This translates into no more than one or two generations back being the recipients of such rituals. Multiple evidence of bone manipulation practices also corroborates the existence of an ancestor cult. They indicate a varied, sometimes multistage process before the interred human remains became ancestors. The most frequent case was pushing aside earlier inhumations to make space for a new one in the chamber tomb. The action was deliberate, not just sweeping aside old bones. Bones were also removed from graves after complete or partial decomposition, reburied as secondary burials or only partly buried. A secondary burial might have been deposited in a simple pit or conducted with pomp (as, for example, a collective human burial in a chamber tomb at the top of the tell in Tell Arbid, where an equid was deposited as a secondary burial in front of the tomb).[141] The sequence of post-funeral rites associated primarily with family vault burials impacted the status of the deceased as an ancestor. The dead were transformed from individuals with distinct bodies to an ancestral group with commingled bodies.[142]

Such practices seem to contrast with traditional beliefs expressed in Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, ordering a complete corpse to be buried without further interference.[143] The practical expression of such beliefs might have been perceived differently in antiquity. Bone manipulation might have been an expression of negotiation and reaffirming social identities without violating the concept of body integrity.[144] Careful curation and manipulation of human skeletal material appears to indicate a growing connection between ancestors, kinship groups, and claims to prime land and resources.[145] The burying of a venerated family member near one's home allows this ancestor to be remembered, honored and possibly invoked by relatives, since the deceased's spirit might have beneficial or harmful influence over the living. Vaulted chamber tombs and ancestor cult disseminated in the MBA II at the moment of renegotiated political authority. As Ristvet points out, commemoration of ancestors becomes a shared cultural language over ethnic differentiation in a new political reality.

Settled vs. nomadic from a mortuary perspective

Isolated cemeteries had more characteristics, in addition to their specific location, representing the nomadic idiom. They were organized according to specific rules, reflecting a clan hierarchy where a clan leader was buried at the highest point and in the center of the cemetery, while other burials were concentrated around it. The deceased were buried in large tumuli graves built at the top of prominent natural landforms, to be visible from afar as well as, in all likelihood, to mark the land they belonged to. The burial structures were not visibly intended for multiple reopening. However, the visibility of a burial ground allowed relations to return to it and created, in fact, a standing commemorative monument in honor of the ancestors. Indications of collective burials, bone manipulation, and traces of grave goods found outside the grave chambers, further support a concept of ancestor veneration (although not necessarily on a regular basis). The material culture (pottery, grave containers) from these cemeteries finds parallels in contemporary material coming from the surrounding areas. There is also, however, an emanation of other affiliations exemplified by finds without

140 Tsukimoto 1985; Jacquet 2012, 43–46; Ristvet 2014, 94.

141 Wygnańska 2014.

142 Parker Pearson 1999, 5–6; Cradic 2017, 220–224.

143 Bottero 1980; Cassin 1982; Van der Stede 2007.

144 Bolger 2008.

145 Bloch-Smith 1992, 110–121; Bradbury and Philip 2016, 313.

good parallels: Weapons typical of the Levant and mostly absent from graves in the closest settlements or the presence of wooden furniture.

The cemeteries represent a nomadic burial tradition, differing in detail from that observed in the settlements. Corroborating this would be a concept expressed in the texts from Mari that the nomads were outsiders and were not considered part of Mesopotamian societies.[146] Hence, the literary motive of the barbarian Amorites not burying their dead, known from "The marriage of Martu" myth (see below).

5. Amorite and tribal affiliation in the MBA based on written sources

The Amorites as a distinct ethnos interacting with other Mesopotamian populations and shaping the political developments of this period is a much-debated issue, its complexity and intricacy well exceeding the scope of this paper. Multidimensional summaries of the discussion have been put forward in recent years by, among others, Daniel Flemming (2009), Rients de Boer (2014), Stephen Burke (2014), and Robert Homsher and Melissa Cradic (2018). Most of these considerations fail to find the evidence for an ethnically Amorite Mesopotamia in the times of the Amorite dynasties.

The Amorites appeared in Mesopotamian written sources in the latter half of the 3rd millennium BC and by the 18th century BC, Amorite name-bearing rulers were in control of most of southern and northern Mesopotamia. At that time, the Amorite people were, however, a minority (8–27 % based on names).[147] They were admittedly distinguished from other peoples in southern Mesopotamia.[148] Sometimes this otherness of the Amorites was equated with a different lifestyle, odd for the Mesopotamians, because it was nomadic. The literary topos of a barbarian regarding the Amorites appears interestingly in the "Marriage of Martu," a myth perpetuated in the Old Babylonian tradition. Remarkably, they were accused of not burying their dead:

He is a tent dweller [buffeted by] wind and rain…
Has no house in his lifetime
Is not brought to burial when he dies
(The Marriage of Martu, ETCSL)

This text did not refer to the otherness of the Amorites as an ethnic entity, but of the nomads who buried their dead outside settlements. When the myth was copied and preserved in the MBA II, it was already referring to legendary times and equating the nomads with the Amorites. The evidence emerging from the written sources is quite contradictory, showing the Amorite people mainly as hired mercenaries and very rarely as nomads.[149]

By the 2nd millennium BC, the Amorites had already been culturally assimilated. Those who remained nomads were referred to as "the tribes," not as the Amorites.[150] Based on mentions in cuneiform sources, "Amorites" should be viewed as a fluid concept that changed over time and from place to place. Regarding burial practices, it is also quite clear that areas where similar funerary practices were conducted were ethnically mixed.[151]

Tribal realities and affiliations preponderated over distinct ethnic identity in northern Mesopotamia.[152] People were usually identified as inhabitants of certain cities or belonging to certain tribes.[153] The state in northern Mesopotamia came together with the pastoral tribes in a single social web.[154] These people professing different lifestyles interacted on a regular basis during the first half of the 2nd millennium BC and did not stand in opposition to people of different ethnic background as a rule, instead, constituting part of their societies. As Homsher and Cradic pointed out, there was no "Amorite" homogenous entity or *koine* ethnoswise.[155] Tribal affiliation replaced the "Amorite" affiliation in the written sources: The tribes mentioned in Old Babylonian sources are never distinguished as "Amorite."[156] Tribal organization structured land and pasture ownership as well as military organization; there is no clear textual evidence for these tribes as political actors before the 3rd dynasty of Ur.[157] The importance of tribes in

[146]   Fleming 2009, 230.

[147]   de Boer 2014, 277.

[148]   de Boer 2014, 277.

[149]   De Boer 2014, 279.

[150]   de Boer 2014, 280.

[151]   There were Hurrian, Akkadian and Amorite names in the MBA II texts from the region (Heimpel 2003, 13–35; Buccellati 1979, 86).

[152]   Heimpel 2003, 19–20; de Boer 2014, 281.

[153]   De Boer 2014, 39.

[154]   Fleming 2009, 228.

[155]   Homsher and Cradic 2018.

[156]   de Boer 2014, 280.

[157]   Ristvet 2014, 103.

northern Mesopotamia in the early 2nd millennium BC was a response to earlier imperial politics of the 3rd dynasty of Ur and the changing environmental and political milieu.[158] The tribes were not only groups of pastoral nomads but a political construct across ethnic or linguistic affiliations basing their membership on constructed kinship.[159] The tribes often shared relationships with other polities in the region. Thus, Zimir-Lim was called "the king of the Sim'alites" by Hammurabi in a letter, emphasizing his tribal and not urban identity. Indeed, the kings' titles referred to their position as rulers of sedentary and/or pastoral peoples.[160]

It was reassumed that there was also a constructed Amorite identity in the Old Babylonian period (MBA II) used by some groups, dynasties among others. This is indicated, for example, by the fabricated genealogy of the Hammurabi dynasty claiming an Amorite, pastoral lineage.[161] De Boer has suggested that the "Amorite" phenomenon should be treated as equivalent to the concept of "with tribal connections."[162] Furthermore, he points out that not everybody had tribal connections. Not all of the city dwellers, for example, did, while it was they who used writing and sometimes perceived the tribal kings and their people as Amorites. However, in some historical circumstances during the MBA, it became a desirable constructed identity to which people may have aspired, following their leaders.

6. Conclusions

A shared ritual affiliation emerges from a study of MBA mortuary practices, showing new common trends in Mesopotamian burial customs. It does not mean that there was a sharp break in all burial traditions generally between the 3rd and the 2nd millennium BC; there was no change, for example, in the mode of deposition, and some grave types, such as shafts in the north, remained in continuous use. However, changes appeared in relevant ritual variables, such as spatial organization of burial places on the macro- and the microscale and an apparent emphasis on sustained contact between the living and the deceased and on family or clan bonds, reflected in bone manipulation and commemoration practices. This focus on tribal or familial ties overlaps official rank differentiation in the funerary record in a private context. Funerary rituals appear not to reflect upon hierarchical status, unlike the 3rd millennium BC. These were not rulers or state officials but ancestral, collective family representatives who were honored by elaborate grave structures, post-funeral rituals or an accompanying equid burial. The use of vaulted chambers, designed to be reopened for various reasons, was concomitant with the idea of recurrent ritual contact with the ancestors.

The MBA Mesopotamian burial customs, as painted by the archaeological evidence, were not entirely uniform, reflecting the diversity of the communities that practiced them. One observes various levels of variation caused by cultural and environmental circumstances when studying the record: Urban vs. rural, settled vs. nomadic, long-lasting vs. short-lived, etc. We cannot single out one paradigm for the funerary practices all over Mesopotamia and it is hardly even expected, as culture or society is not characterized by a single type of burial. On the contrary, one society will take over different forms of burial, and these forms will often be correlated with the status of the deceased.[163] Thus, distinctive features, such as animal sacrifices, are observed generally in the Jezireh region and weapons as a male status marker occur in the north, while the absence of chamber tombs is noted in the Middle Euphrates settlements. However, evidence shows an increase in residential burials, rich variations in grave types mirroring differentiated social status and, most of all, a strong emphasis on kinship, nurturing family ties over institutionalized hierarchy. These shared features, combined, are unique for the MBA in the region, although none of them, taken separately, was unique in any other period of Ancient Near Eastern history.

Most of the settlements in Mesopotamia did not witness any long-lasting break between the 3rd and the 2nd millennium BC, but the crisis at the very beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, corresponding to the period after the fall of the 3rd Dynasty of Ur, resulted in substantial sociopolitical changes. The MBA burial customs, despite retaining an affinity with earlier periods, did not evolve in the strict sense of the term but seem to have been

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[158] MICHAŁOWSKI 2011; PORTER 2012; RISTVET 2012; RISTVET and WEISS 2014.

[159] TAPPER 1990, 51; RISTVET 2014, 101.

[160] RISTVET 2014, 101.

[161] FINKELSTEIN 1966; DE BOER 2014, 41.

[162] DE BOER 2014, 40.

[163] UCKO 1969, 270.

reformulated in the early 2nd millennium BC to reflect an entirely new social situation, possibly also associated with the involvement of people with tribal affiliations. It did not involve ethnic movements as changes in burial rites do not have to be associated with ethnic stability or instability.[164] The situation observed throughout Mesopotamia explained the need to negotiate identities and legitimize descent and rights to land and power without newcomers. Changes observed in burial customs may be one of the ways to conduct such negotiations. Assuming that the ritually consistent burial customs were different from those observed in other periods or other regions, they constituted a way to construct a group identity and represented a particular ideology. The role of the Amorites as a homogenous group, responsible for a variety of changes in the MBA, has to be rejected in favor of a sociocultural transformation.[165] Thus, it is evidence not of migration that is sought but of acculturation of distinctive elements of a new identity. The social background of the formation of this ideology was certainly complex, but the involvement of people of tribal origins, real or constructed, both settled and nomadic, assimilated or hostile, but in a constant interaction with Mesopotamian urban societies during the MBA, cannot be excluded.

The characteristic features of MBA burial rituals took on their fully developed form at most of the studied sites around the 18th century BC. As such, they were an expression of association with a group identity constructed in specific circumstances. The early 2nd millennium BC was a period of instability and social change, which witnessed the creation of multiple polities. Legitimacy in the new political situation was achieved through engagement with ancestors as well as the past. Commemoration of the past occurs most often cross-culturally during periods of rapid transformation when previous social patterns are disrupted.[166] Both states and individuals negotiated their past through the elaboration of burial customs and commemorative rituals; tombs and houses were a place of commemorative practices that helped to create new ideas of kinship and belonging. The disappearance of these specific burial customs

coincided not only with the sociopolitical changes of the mid-2nd millennium BC Mesopotamia but also with a blurring of tribal connections that can be seen in the textual sources. They became much less important at all levels of social and state organization.

This trend also occurred elsewhere in the Near East. Elements of a similar ideology were reflected in the mortuary record at some sites in the Levant, although we also cannot speak of homogeneity throughout this vast area. There was a considerable shift from single to multiple successive burials from the MB II in the southern Levant.[167] Inhumation burials and standardization of grave kits, possibly related to the age of the deceased, were shared by all MBA Levantine sites.[168] Other variables, such as tomb concept and inhumation methods, were more diversified and were linked to different social identities of the deceased that became especially important during the late MBA and in the early Late Bronze Age.[169] In the Levant, chamber tombs appeared beside pit graves and cists in MBA I and became the most widespread in MBA II, having been found at 14 sites.[170] Not all of them included dromoi, suggesting a different ritual attitude toward the postmortem status of the deceased. Chamber tombs housed both individual and collective burials (sometimes as many as several dozen individuals). Bone manipulation practices were also attested. The role of surviving kin in maintaining a family tomb and making prayers and offerings to the ancestors is more evident starting from the Late Bronze Age.[171]

In reference to observable similarities of burial practices at Tell Dab'a, it should be said that important funeral variables of MBA Mesopotamia are also visible in the archaeological record in the eastern Nile Delta. Grave location had been intramural since the earliest phase of Canaanite occupation at Tell Dab'a: Areas between houses, open plazas or courtyards, and space under house floors were used as grave locations, which is also in keeping with standards known from northern Mesopotamia and the Levant in this period. In the earliest phase, the tombs were loosely arranged, probably clustered in family groups in the vicinity of a Syrian-style building.[172] In the following phas-

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[164]   Ucko 1969, 274.

[165]   Homsher and Cradic 2018.

[166]   Hobsbawm 1983; Ricœr 2004; Connerton 1989; Ristvet 2014, 94.

[167]   Brody 2010; Bradbury and Philip 2017, 20.

[168]   Baker 2012; Cradic 2017, 226.

[169]   Cradic 2017, 226.

[170]   Cradic 2017, 226.

[171]   Bradbury and Philip 2017, 17.

[172]   Kopetzky 2014, 124.

es, when the site became more densely built-up, the graves were located in accessible, inhabited spaces. The grave types, which included pits and vessels (mostly for children), mud-brick cists (roofed in a way similar to the "diamond-type" roofing from the Upper Khabur, but with abutting bricks creating a roof ridge), and vaulted chamber tombs were exogenous to the Egyptian tradition.[173] Most of the chambers, however, were associated with individual burials. Some of the tombs had brick-built entrance shafts, others an additional chamber where the grave goods were deposited, which seems to be a variant of the dromos concept from Mesopotamia. Traces of superstructures were evidenced only for the larger tombs in some phases, but the position of the tomb was often marked on the surface. Additionally, there were trees planted in front of each tomb and arranged in rows, apparently an old Egyptian tradition.[174] There were also after-entombment as well as after-funeral rituals practiced at the tombs (also at Tell Maskhuta[175]). The tombs were revisited and cultic activities can be traced in some cases for two to three generations.[176] The offerings, including vessels, were deposited in front of the tombs, in pits cutting through the refill and the earlier depositions in the tomb dromos.[177] One should keep in mind that the idea of care for the deceased through deposition of food and drink was indigenous to the ancient Egyptian believers.[178] Symptomatically, the pottery found outside the tombs represented an Egyptian repertoire of forms, while grave goods found inside the tombs were locally produced.[179] The deceased were laid to rest in a supine position or on the side in a contracted position. In the case of collective burials, older remains were swept aside. Intentional rearrangement of bones was very rare, however. In a single case only, the disarticulated bones of two individuals were found in a jar set next to the tomb wall.[180] It seems that bone manipulation, observed both in Mesopotamia and the Levant, was unfamiliar at Tell Dab'a. The most striking similarity between Tell Dab'a and the region of the Upper Khabur in Mesopotamia, apart from the appearance of the chamber tombs, are the equid burials deposited in front of their entrances. Unlike the Upper Khabur, however, they were buried mostly in pairs (although single or triple burials are also known) and were associated mainly with individual burials.[181]

This very brief synopsis made to address a question of parallel ritual behaviors between the regions demonstrates that funerary variables observed at Tell Daba'a represented a mixture of Egyptian and exogenous, not only Levantine or Mesopotamian elements.[182] They are seemingly analogous but also different from a Mesopotamian perspective. Forstner-Müller dismissed a shared ideology of external origin, pointing out that the funerary practices reflect the evolution of a local community cut off from the previous Egyptian authority of the 13th Dynasty. Kopetzky, on the other hand, distinguishes a variety of clearly Levantine and Mesopotamian "borrowings" that appeared in Tell Dab'a, together with a new population. Funerary practices of the kind described above have been associated with the Hyksos settlement during the Second Intermediate Period, in the late MBA I and II.[183] During the late 12th dynasty, a Canaanite population apparently migrated to this site and adopted an Egyptian style of life, retaining, however, a more conservative mix of Canaanite and Egyptian traditions in their burial rituals.[184] Keeping in mind the presence of apparently exogenous concepts, such as grave types and equid burials that make their appearance at approximately the same time in Mesopotamia and the Levant, it is difficult to reject offhand the potentiality of acculturation of some elements of external origin. They were possibly adopted in order to affiliate the users to a desired constructed identity in a situation of social and political change. While a more detailed discussion of the topic is needed, at this point it may be hypothesized that shared ideology and the necessity for political legitimization could have made such concepts comprehensible rather than strange to the eastern Nile delta population of the Hyksos period.

[173] Kopetzky 2014.
[174] Bietak 1994, 18.
[175] Brody 2008, 527.
[176] Kopetzky 2014, 134.
[177] Schiestl 2009, 442.
[178] Kopetzky 2014, 139.
[179] Forstner-Müller 2010.
[180] Kopetzky 2014, 136–137.
[181] Schiestl 2009, 179–182.
[182] Bietak 1989, 2018.
[183] Forstner-Müller 2010.
[184] Kopetzky 2014.

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